

LUTON

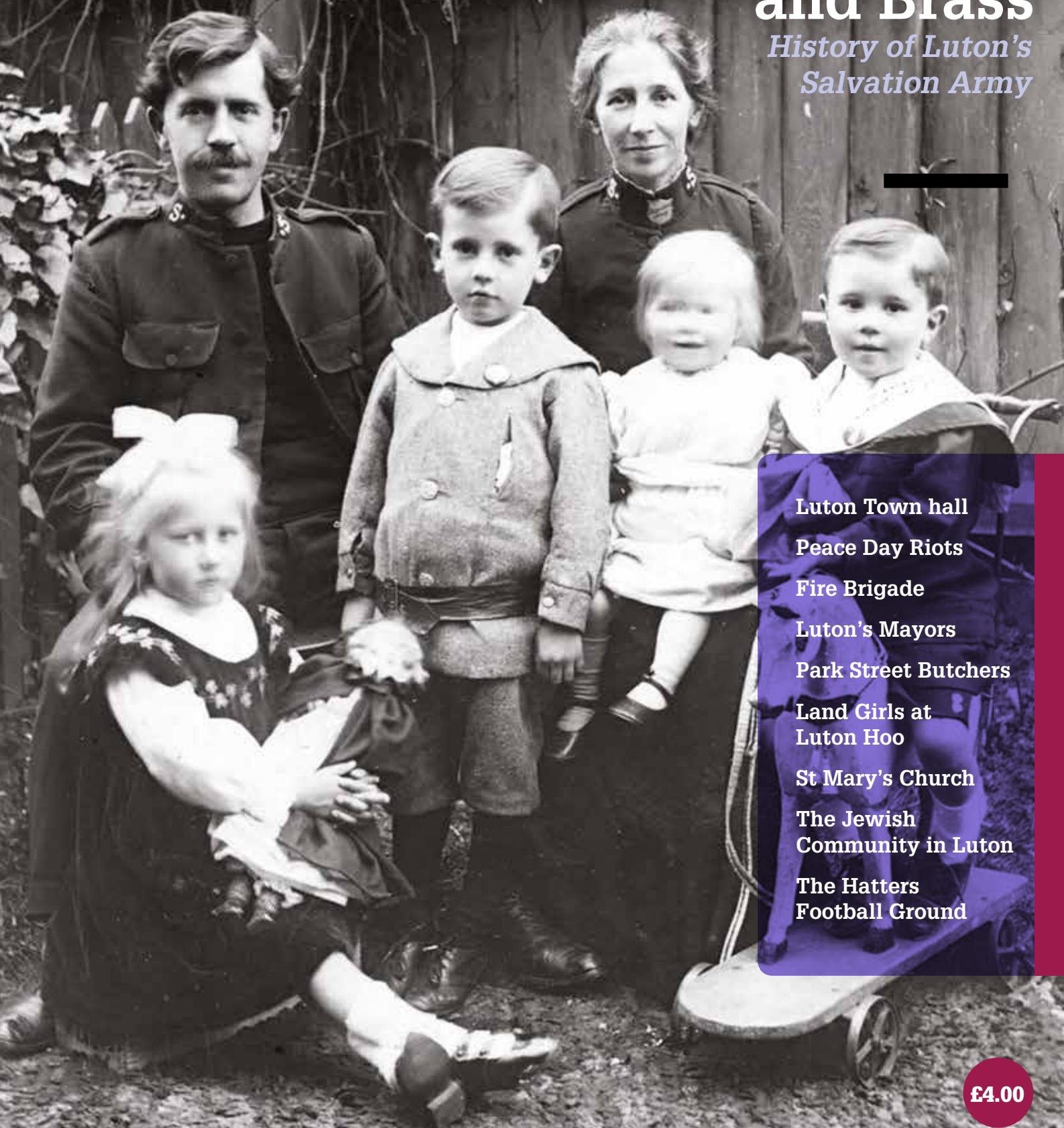
Heritage

ISSUE 2 | JANUARY 2020



Bonnets and Brass

*History of Luton's
Salvation Army*



Luton Town hall

Peace Day Riots

Fire Brigade

Luton's Mayors

Park Street Butchers

Land Girls at
Luton Hoo

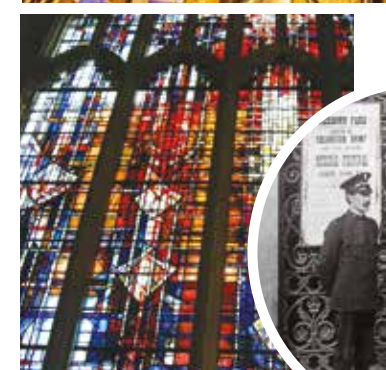
St Mary's Church

The Jewish
Community in Luton

The Hatters
Football Ground

£4.00

Front cover: Mr and Mrs Day and family,
Luton Salvation Army (date unknown)



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Looking forward

Paul Hammond, January 2020

I'd like to welcome all readers to the second edition of Luton Heritage magazine.

The first edition sold out all of its 300 copies so now we have come back with a second with four additional pages – so I hope you agree that we still provide excellent value even though the cover charge has raised slightly.

Many thanks go to The Culture Trust | Luton who agreed to sell the magazine at its venues, thus giving local people a number of accessible places to make their purchase.

We are also delighted that Luton Heritage won the Environmental prize at the November Love Luton Awards in recognition of our work with talks, walks and this publication. What with the Cultural Histories Community Company also picking up a similar award for its work with the People, Power, Passion project this summer, it's good to see heritage picking up some silverware.

It has also been heartening to see a range of organisations and individuals coming together to provide a year-long programme of historical tours and walks around the town. The town hall, St Mary's, Luton Hoo mansion, football club and Walter Wrights hat factory have joined together to provide rare access to buildings and sites that present a cross-section of our heritage in an engaging manner.

Moves are afoot at the council to develop their heritage offer after appearing to be dormant for much of the last decade. They have submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to appoint a Heritage Enabler very much in the mould of their equivalent in the field of Culture and the Arts.

This role would establish a voice for heritage within LBC and galvanise support for a town-wide strategy that celebrates the past as well as linking with regeneration plans going forward. A heritage enabler would be able to

link and encourage grassroots organisations as well as advising on matters such as the Town Centre Master Plan and implementing management plans for our five conservation areas.

So – as we enter the new year there's a mood of anticipation, matched with desire to see Luton Heritage published on a quarterly basis within 2020. In this edition we look back at the commemoration of the 1919 Town Hall fire as well as welcoming articles from a number of the organisations being represented in our 2019-20 walk and tour programme. We are also pleased to feature an article that highlights the history of the town's Jewish community. Four decades ago the growing Muslim community used the local kosher butchers as a source of halal meat before their own outlets became established. This co-existence was reinforced through the ownership of the Bury Park Road Synagogue passing over to those establishing a new mosque in the area.

Please enjoy the articles and do get back to us with insights and memories of your own as we seek to chronicle the changing face of Luton.

With thanks ●



Paul Hammond is Chair of Luton Heritage Forum and conducts regular historic guided walks around the town.



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Luton Central Library's Local Studies collection contains material on all aspects of life in Bedfordshire, with special emphasis on Luton. There is also limited coverage of the neighbouring counties of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The collection is located on the 1st floor of Luton Central Library.

For more information visit <https://www.lutonculture.com/luton-libraries>, email libraryinfo@lutonculture.com, or speak to a member of staff at any of our libraries.

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Matthew Butcher

A proud Lutonian with strong links to the past of the town and grandson to twice mayor of Luton Alderman Hedley Lawrence MBE



Sheryl Lindsay

Born in Luton, Sheryl has a passion for family and local history. She is descended from a long line of Lutonians, many of whom worked in the hat industry.



David Kilby

David Kilby was born in Luton in 1939 and has always had an interest in Luton's Public Houses of which he currently has a collection of over 1,000 photographs.



Diane Cullen

Diane is a Lutonian, born in Stopsley. She belongs to the Friends of Luton Museum, Luton and District Historical Society and local history group of Luton U3A



Sid Rutstein

Sid is an elder at Luton United Synagogue and is President of Luton North Rotary.



Les Stonnell

After careers with the Royal Navy and BT, retirement saw Les take up writing and so far he has two books published and is currently in the process of writing a third novel.



Greg Harrison

Greg was born in Luton, educated in Luton and I has lived in Luton for most of his life. After he retired, he became much more interested in his family history and as a result of that, the history of Bedfordshire and Luton in particular.



Brian Webb

Brian was born in Luton and is a life-long Luton Town fan as well as a committee member of "Hatters' Heritage." His website thestrawplaiters.com uncovers the history of the club in the Victorian era.



Peter Adams

Peter has been based at St Mary's, the town centre Parish Church of Luton since 2007, where he is Director of its Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.



Matthew Bujok

Matthew is a year 4 teacher with the Shared Learning Trust in Luton.



The Heritage Team, Culture Trust Luton

A progressive charitable trust that welcomes people to visit our venues and enjoy their diverse programme of events. They work to build a brighter future for arts and culture in Luton.



Luton Hoo Hotel

Luton Hoo is a 5 star hotel to the south of Luton. They conduct historical tours of the listed mansion on request.



An early 1880s photo of the town hall before the pub and shop either side were incorporated into the central structure

Ashes to Ashes

Luton's First Town hall

Sheryl Lindsay

Lutonians have recently commemorated the centenary of the burning down of their "old town hall". It was the need for a public building where court proceedings could take place that first necessitated the construction of this building. The expansion of Luton's population in the mid-nineteenth century had led to the establishment of a county court in 1846 to deal with increases in crime. As there was no local authority, it fell to local businessmen to provide the funding, most notably Robert How, John Higgins and Richard Hazelhurst, who were straw hat manufacturers, and Charles

Austin, a solicitor. These men formed the Luton Town Hall Company and sold shares valued at £10 each.

The site chosen for the new building was known as Cross Hill, originally a farm and stables located at the junction of the roads to

The site chosen for the new building was known as Cross Hill, originally a farm and stables

Bedford and Dunstable. Three houses and a garden occupied the space in 1846. The Town Hall was constructed by John William and sons and designed by Evan Owen Williams in the classical style of the day with Doric (Greek style) columns. It opened on 27th August 1847 having cost £2200 to build. The new building consisted of a basement, an entrance hall with two rooms on each side and a large room straight ahead with two small adjoining rooms. A broad staircase led to a large assembly room with a balcony. The smaller rooms were used for meetings and rented out to organisations such as the Luton Literary and Scientific



Left: a postcard view of the town hall circa 1910 with trams now in sight (commenced 1908)

Below: A modern day photo of the mayoral chain (found in the ashes of the fire,) the mace and a photograph of Henry Impey with his mace bearer John Rignall



→ Institution, the Savings Bank, the Great Northern Railway ticket office and the School Board, with the large room being used by the police and the County Courts. Upstairs, the large assembly room was used for public meetings and entertainment.

In 1856 a small clock and bell tower were added to the building to commemorate the end of the Crimean War. The clock was funded by public subscription and the bell chimed every hour.

Uses of the Town Hall for social functions were many and varied, from science and art classes five times a week in 1871 to the appearance of Miss De Montford, a mesmerist, in 1875. In My 1880 Luton Cricket Club held its annual concert at the Town Hall featuring “several London artistes” and in 1882 Reverend Arthur Mursell gave a lecture in connection with the Luton Wesleyan Young Men’s Christian Association.

→ In December 1889 the building hosted Sarah Thorne’s Dramatic Company’s play “Judge Not”.

Sadly, the Town Hall was never financially successful. The County Court moved to a new building in Stuart Street in 1858 and in 1873 a decision was made to sell and dissolve the Town Hall Company. It was eventually sold to the Board of Health for £2,125 in 1875.

In 1873 “The Luton Times and Advertiser” reported on the remodelling and expansion of the

building using local bricks. Three years later Luton received a Charter of Incorporation granting it borough status and the first meeting of the council took place in the Town Hall. It was now a local authority building, the new borough council taking over the work of the old Board of Health. With lots of new departments more office space was required and in 1887 the Belgium Arms pub next door was purchased to become the office for the Sanitary Inspector, Tolls Collector and the Inspector of Weights and Measures. In 1893 Rosson’s shop adjacent to the Town Hall, additional retail premises, a warehouse and a shop in Manchester Street were also acquired. The shop became the Food Office. In 1879 a butcher’s shop and three cottages in Upper George Street were also purchased by the Council.

Had fate not intervened with the burning down of the Town Hall in 1919 it is possible that the original building might have had to be demolished. Following the

destruction “The Luton Reporter” had referred to the destroyed building as; “by no means an imposing or particularly attractive building”. The paper also noted that the town had outgrown the building 25 years earlier. In 1911 the council had petitioned a bill to build afresh on the existing site and the Luton Corporation Act was passed to enable this eventuality. During 1913-14 the Corporation were looking at the practicalities of building a new municipal building. The outbreak of WWI would mean their plans were put on hold, although as late as 1918 the Council considered putting the idea of a new building to the public.

On 20th July 1919 Lutonians walking up George Street would find their town Hall a burnt out ruin. All archives and relics, including portions of a manorial roll from 1409, were destroyed. It would be a further seventeen years before the building we see today occupied the empty space left behind. ●

The Luton Peace Day Riots

– A Personal Battle...

David Kilby

Like any large families – my mother was actually one of ten (five boys and five girls) – and like most families, there are always some that just don’t get on. Their personalities just clash.

Mum’s two brothers, George and Harry, never really got on and it was believed to be because George worked in an office whilst Harry was a butcher, which he considered to be a much more ‘masculine employment’.

Indeed, all of the brothers except George were all employed in manual employment, whilst George alone worked in an office.

George was also a ‘Special Constable’, which I suppose didn’t

help the situation either and come the day of the Peace Day Riots – when Luton Town Hall was burnt down – George was just one of many such people called in to assist in endeavouring to keep law and order.

George was apparently on duty at the burning Town Hall when he was

hit by a brick – which hit him on the head – that resulted in him having to be removed from the main line of action so he that could be treated for the blow to his head.

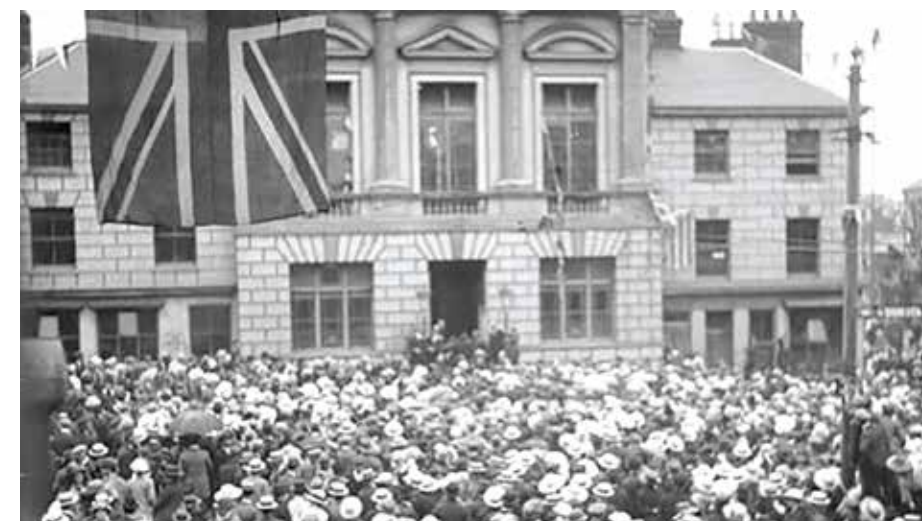
As the Town Hall was surrounded by what could only be classed as an ‘angry mob’, it wasn’t possible to see or confirm who had actually thrown the brick that hit him but it was known that Brother Harry was at the Town Hall and George had indeed seen him there but when other members of the family asked outright, ‘Harry did you throw the brick that hit your Brother George?’, the answer they got was strictly non-committal. In fact, Harry refused to give any kind of answer. He just gave a knowing kind of smile that more of less said it all.

Even years later Harry never ever did admit to throwing the brick that hit his brother and to all subsequent queries over the years only ever answered with that smile that said ‘I know everything but am saying nothing’.

George, on the other hand, swore that it was Harry that had thrown the brick – he just couldn’t back it up with indisputable evidence.

George and Harry never resolved their differences to the end of their days and Harry took the mystery of ‘who threw the brick’ to his grave. ●

Even years later Harry never ever did admit to throwing the brick that hit his brother



Outside the town hall on riot day – notice the number of people wearing straw hats



Luton's Fire Brigade

— and its role in the 1919 town hall fire

Greg Harrison

Luton has had a Fire Brigade since 1836, when the Brigade operated out of an old shed in Stuart Street and, with no horses, volunteer firemen had to drag their machine through the streets by their own labour. Their equipment was provided solely by gratuitous contributions. Then, in 1864, the Brigade was taken over by The Local Board of Health and later, in 1876, they came under the control of the newly formed Corporation.

A purpose-built fire station was built in Church Street, next to St Mary's Hall and opened in 1902. Telephonic communication was then established with all the firemen. Up until 1914 the firemen were part-time and voluntary and were called from their homes or places of work when there was a blaze. It was in 1914 that a nucleus of full-time firemen was recruited and the first Dennis motor engines began to replace the old popular horses.

On 19th July 1919, fire appliances left from the Church Street station

to attend the Town Hall fire. At this time, there were 18 firemen, half of whom were still volunteers.

The rioters got into the Town Hall through the windows of the Food Office and started fires using piles of ration books and coupons. At 10:25pm, the Chief Constable put through a telephone call to the Fire Brigade. The Chief Officer there decided that the Town Hall's internal hydrant should be enough to extinguish the fires and four firemen were despatched from The Church Street station. These men were successful in controlling the original fire in the Food Office, but other fires were being started elsewhere.

Then, disaster struck - the hydrant failed and cut off the flow of water. A call was made to the Fire Station and a Fire Engine was despatched from the Station at 11:07pm. On arriving at the Town Hall, the firemen began to get the apparatus ready, but they were attacked by the crowd. The fire engine was surrounded and damaged; the firemen were injured



Opposite page: Fire brigade c 1890. From a 'Luton at Work and Play' calendar 1988. Notation says 'at the stables', this was at their original station in Stuart Street; **Above:** Luton Fire Brigade formed this triumphal arch outside their station in St Mary's Road to greet the Prince of Wales on November 17, 1926. The object of the Royal visit was to present new colours and drums to the 2nd Battalion, Beds & Herts Regiment. To the left of the fire station is St Mary's School and Hall, while in the background is the chimney of Luton Electricity Works.

by stones being thrown, their brass helmets giving some protection. As a result of the constant barrage of missiles from the hostile crowd, the firemen retreated and returned safely to the station.

Meanwhile, the fires began to take hold and were boosted by the use of petrol. The firemen made another attempt to get to the Town hall and

fight the blaze, this time under police protection. However, missiles were continued to be thrown and attempts were made to cut the hoses. All the firemen were now at the scene and water was being directed at the adjoining buildings to prevent the fire from spreading. Other hoses were being used to keep the rioters at bay.

Finally, after the arrival of troops from Biscot Camp at 3:00 am, the area was cleared and the firemen could concentrate on putting out the fire in the Town Hall which was achieved by about 4:30 am. They then remained busy damping down smouldering material and pulling down internal walls that were in a dangerous state.

Some 20 firemen attended the Town hall fire and were in attendance between 15 and 30 hours. Most of

them had injuries to their bodies, one had concussion and one had internal injuries.

In 1930 Luton had the most serious fire in its recent history when Vyse's hat factory in Bute Street was gutted and eight people were killed. In the midst of World War 2, our firemen were called to London to help fight blazes at the height of the Blitz.

The Church Street fire station was replaced by one in Park Street at the end of the war on the site of the houses destroyed by a parachute mine, before Beds County Council provided the then very modern station in Studley Road in 1956.

(Extract from "Where They Burnt the Town Hall Down" by Dave Craddock, published by the Book Castle in 1999) ●

In the midst of World War 2, our firemen were called to London to help fight blazes at the height of the Blitz

From one mayor to another

Matthew J Butcher

My grandfather Hedley Lawrence was 9 years old in September 1919 when, as a school boy attending Dunstable Road School, he was presented with The Peace Day Medal. This medal was one of probably at least 7,000 distributed to schoolchildren in Luton. They had been paid for by the former mayor John Henry Staddon, one of the directors of Vyse and Co.

Staddon made the generous donation after it had become clear that very few people had considered the children of Luton when arranging the celebrations for Peace Day. In order to ensure a quality product not paid for out of the local rates and enough for all, Staddon had been authorised to double the amount donated from the original estimate of £100.

Unfortunately, the medal order was made somewhat late and the manufacturer Messrs. Mappin and Webb reported that it would



Above: Matthew Butcher (the writer), as a baby, being held by his grandfather Alderman Hedley Lawrence MBE at his inauguration ceremony as Luton Mayor, 1974;
bottom left: an example of the Peace Day medals

be impossible for them to deliver before 20th August, and so as a consequence well after the July Peace Day Celebrations. This was another background element of complaint that fuelled the rioting in July.

Staddon toured the schools of Luton on the Monday and Tuesday before the children's event of the 18th of September handing out medals in bulk to the head teachers. The medals were handed; "over to the children and pinned on their coats or dresses just before they formed up for the procession."

The children started at Beech Hill and then processed down through George Street, along Park Street and then into Luton Hoo. During the celebrations they drank tea served from 3 marquees and ate a mixture of food supplied by Messrs. Slaters of Park Square. There were plenty of sporting activities for the children to

take part in and for those not inclined there were clowns and Punch and Judy stalls offering entertainment. The day finished with a firework display to an estimated crowd of 25,000.

In his address to the Council in June John Staddon had stated; "He thought they were all anxious that if a medal was given it should be one which the children would be tempted to retain, and not discard and forget in a month or two." My grandfather certainly valued and kept his medal.

He left school aged 14 and then served a 5 year carpenters apprenticeship with the firm of H.C. Janes Ltd. He was elected to Luton Council in 1937 representing the Legrave Ward and began his first mayoralty 2 days after his 42nd birthday in 1954, becoming the first Quaker Mayor of Luton since William Bigg was elected in 1876. ●

In the two years spanning 1917 and 1919, Charles Dillingham and Henry Impey held the office of Mayor – but only one will be remembered for presiding over a town-wide disaster.

Charles Dillingham was born in Cobden Street, Luton in 1859 with his father Denbigh being a sawyer. He had 6 brothers and 2 sisters. At the young age of 21 the census states he was a hat manufacturer and by the 1891 census he had married Ada and they had 6 children. His straw hat manufacturing business was very prosperous being based in George Street. In 1915 he handed over the directorship to his son Cyril. His hobby was farming and he held 800 acres of land at Streatley. The family lived at Elm Lodge, New Bedford Road.

During these years he represented West Ward on the Council, with 27 years' service. His persistence led to the public baths being built in Waller Street which in winter served as the Winter Assembly Rooms being very popular for dances etc. He became Mayor of Luton in 1917 and he had only been in office two days when he had to escort King George V around Luton. The Luton News stated, 'he undertook his duties admirably from the moment his daughter motored up in smart driving attire to when he bid farewell to the King and his party'. The opening address at his inauguration as Mayor was given by Henry Impey stating – 'Councillor Dillingham is fearless in his expression. He upsets us sometimes by how what I may call unkind straightforwardness but he means right and, although some may

He wanted to talk to the crowds but his colleagues held him back fearful of inciting the crowd more



A Tale of Two Mayors

Dillingham and Impey

Diane Cullen

not always agree with his views or his persistent manner, we cannot but appreciate the lively interest he shows in all matters'. It does sound as if Charles was rather a driving force.

Henry Impey was born in Luton in 1865. Aged 16 he was working as a shop assistant in High Town Road. By 1891 he was Sanitary Inspector for Luton Council and by 1911 he was Estate Surveyor. At the time he was appointed Mayor in November 1918 the family were living at Whitecroft in London Road. He had undertaken many years' service on the Council and it was unfortunate he was Mayor at the fateful time of the town hall riots. A Luton Reporter representative met Mr Impey on the Monday following the riots and was told the Mayor had been advised

Top: Dillingham's hat factory (right) and Farmers music shop before the violence. Notice the people in the top windows taking in the view;
bottom: the same view after the riot with windows smashed and boarded up.

to stay away from the town for a time, not only in the interests of himself and the Mayoress but also for the town. He stated he did not want to flee but wanted to talk to the crowds on Saturday afternoon but his colleagues held him back fearful of inciting the crowd more. Chief Constable could also not guarantee his safety. He stated that his wife was the only woman left in the town hall at 10 pm with the crowds outside smashing windows and trying to get in. Mr Impey was dressed as a special constable and taken from the town hall by a back entrance in Upper George Street at 10.30 p.m. It is believed he was taken to the Bute Hospital on Dunstable Road and from there they left for Harringay. He resigned from the town council at the time of the November 1919 elections having subsequently moved to Lincolnshire where he died in 1930 at the age of 65. He is buried at Rothesay Road cemetery. ●



Taking a Butchers at Park Street

Matthew Bujok



A BIT OF OLD LUTON, DAVIS SHOP PARK SQUARE 195

Many of the 19th century images show an illustrious array of poultry hung outside the shop, attracting many an onlooker

I began researching my family tree some years ago, after seeing 'Who do you think you are' on TV. Although this article is about Davis Butchers shop, it focuses on my Great Great Grandfather Harry Buckley.

I first became aware of Harry Buckley on a cold Remembrance Sunday morning in about 1996, when my father was telling me about my heritage. Tales from various

members of the family, all praise his skills as being very accomplished in the butcher trade. The family story goes that he would collect a chicken from the back yard, and after he had dispatched it and plucked it, he would have to continue to hold onto it as it would still be able to run around the shop. Born in 1865, he was taken on at Davis butchers around 1880 and continued there as a butchers assistant until around 1914.



Opposite page, top:

A coloured photo of the shop that had been in existence since the 1840s.

Bottom: Mary Pike's 'Ham and Beef Shop' to the left of Davis' shop served a wide range of cooked meats – including in 1884 'a boar's head ready for table and a 40-pound plum pudding'

This page, top: Danny's bed shop (previously Durrants Butchers) at 102-104 High Town Road Luton still features the inside and outside hooks used to mount the meat carcasses shown in these photos;

Bottom: Butchers' assistants of the day used to have to keep an eye out for vehicle splashes on the hung meat and wash it down regularly !

Many Pictures feature my great great grandfather alongside Mr Davis, often in a bowler hat and with the most flamboyant moustache.

Davis butchers was originally located at the very top of Park Street, just prior to Market Hill. The site now is occupied by Off The Wall (formally Yates). From various pictures, it was a hive of activity. The building itself would have probably been considered rather old when my Great Great grandfather began working there in about 1881. It was by far the oldest building in the parade, probably being built around the 15th century. Many of the 19th century images show an illustrious array of poultry hung outside the shop, attracting many an onlooker. (a Health and Safety nightmare no doubt by todays standards!)

Unlike today, many buildings were used until it was physically impossible for them to be repaired. Judging by some of the later pictures (taken around 1910) the butchers was no exception, as a lot of dilapidation is apparent, from broken slates along the canopy and more sadly the lack of poultry hanging from the outside. As part of a town wide



modernisation scheme, the site was demolished around 1914, just prior to the commencement of the First World War.

Post closure and demolition, Tommy Davis moved to a shop on Church Street. Harry Buckley would have been about 49 years old by this point and unfortunately my research into his later life is still on-going. Family stories suggested he prepared

game at home in Slip End for the Ludlows at Luton Hoo, where his wife (my great great Grandmother) worked, until his early death around 1930. Hopefully in the not too distant future I can update you on my progress. ●



Land Girls at Luton Hoo

Luton Hoo Estate Volunteer Project

The help of British women is urgent and indispensable! These were the words on a First World War Women's Land Army recruitment poster, encouraging women to work on the land to replace the 100,000 men who had gone to war. Despite the misleading title of 'The Women's Land Army', this organisation was made up of young female civilians, commonly known as 'Land Girls', who worked in either agriculture, forage (haymaking for food for horses) or timber cutting.

1939 saw fears of food shortages due to men leaving the land to join

the services in World War Two and attacks by German U boats threatened the import of food. Rationing was introduced and every able-bodied person was used for food production. The Women's Land Army that had been training and working in and around Hertfordshire in the First World War reformed and began to recruit and train girls of between 17 and 30 years old. Luton Hoo had been one of the estates that

offered accommodation and training in World War One and it reopened to accommodate the Women's Land Army in World War Two.

After an initial offer of rooms in two unfurnished cottages on the estate, the Bothy was used for the accommodation of between 16 and 20 girls. This had been inspected and found to be acceptable. A list of rules was drawn up and leaders were selected from the trainee Land Army girls.

The girls would arrive and bring a National Health card, Unemployment card and a Ration Book

Opposite page: Harvesting Onions at Luton Hoo with: Pearl Mr Daffurn Head Gardener Joy Betty Eileen; **below:** The Bothy, 2019; **bottom:** Walled Gardens, 2019



The Bothy was classified as a commercial rather than a residential building, enabling Luton Hoo to claim extra cheese rations and a fishing permit to benefit the girls. A housekeeper was employed to undertake supervision and cooking for 'a training establishment for Women's Land Army workers' in the Garden Bothy.

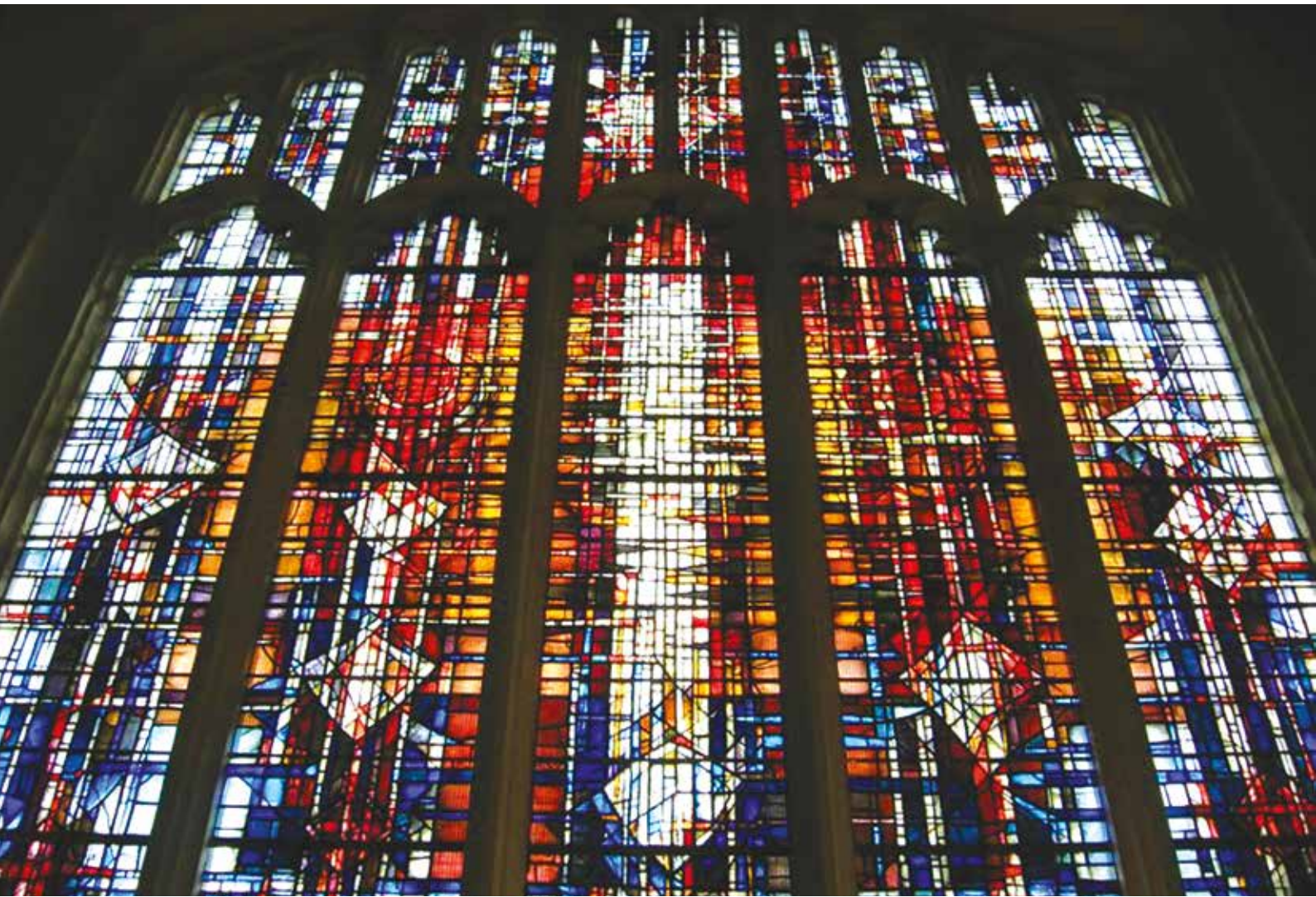
The girls would arrive and bring a National Health card, Unemployment card and a Ration Book – and so their interesting and adventurous lives at Luton Hoo would begin!

The Bothy is still at Luton Hoo Estate, just outside the Walled Garden's walls, although it is now a private residence. The Walled Garden is open to the public from

the first Wednesday in May to the last in September, with events and open days throughout the year. The Walled Garden volunteer project continues to ensure the history of the Walled Garden's Land Girls and the wider history of the estate and garden is diligently researched and updated. There are various opportunities to attend tours and talks at Luton Hoo Estate and hear more about the many incarnations of the Walled Garden, together with the experiences of those whose lives have been intertwined with and effected by their connection with it. Perhaps you have a relative who has their own experience of Luton Hoo and the Walled Garden? If so, please contact office@lutonhooestate.co.uk and we will be in touch. ●

Go to our website: www.lutonhooestate.co.uk to keep up to date, book tickets and hear about the latest events and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram





Opposite page: St Mary's magnificent stained-glass window
Above: View of St Mary's Church from the Mall window

St Marys Church

Discovering Luton's Medieval Jewel

Peter Adams

Stand and take in the grandeur of what many hold to be one of Britain's finest Medieval churches

Perhaps the view of St Marys Church in Luton town centre people know best is through the window at the far end of the Mall. Designed to showcase what has been described as Luton's Medieval Jewel the window is often described as the one thing the shopping centre's architects got right! Glimpsing the ancient building surrounded by trees can feel as though you are glimpsing into a different world.

I'm told beautiful people can feel guilty. Somehow by contrast with them, everyone else seems lacklustre, a bit dull. If St Marys Church

building were to be able to speak with its neighbouring buildings that would probably be its story. The church certainly inspires negative commentary on the surrounding buildings, whether by Lutonians, or those venturing to the town to enjoy its beauty. For example, Simon Jenkins in his "England Thousand Best Churches" typically writes:

"The picture on the cover of the guidebook to Luton parish church is almost comical. The photographer contrives an angle that gives it a site in rural woodland. In reality this fine Perpendicular church is set in some of the worst urban development

that even the Home Counties have to offer, a horror of car parks, one way systems, and hostile shopping centres. Forget Slough O friendly bombs, come to South Bedfordshire."

Being so set apart from the rest of the town rather sadly tends to isolate it. However St Marys is keen to stand together with others and promotes Luton's unique heritage. So venture in with me into the church. You've only a short time today, so let me whet your appetite with a look at the things people come from miles away to see. You'll find it's a building spoken of in terms of its uniqueness, described by superlatives, and related to the great and good of English history.

We enter through the one of the church's three 500 year-old wooden doors. The South door was a gift

from Cardinal Wolsey, onetime Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII. Now, stand and take in the grandeur of what many hold to be one of Britain's finest Medieval churches. The present church building dates from 1121-35, but it was extended over the next 200 years and its current footprint was in place in the mid 1300's. Its size alone is a mark of the wealth and importance of Luton at that time.

Turning around you will see the magnificent stone baptistry, with the font inside. Many fonts have a grand cover, this is the only one in England to have a walk-in stone canopy. An extended family along with godparents gathering to baptise a child can all fit inside! The baptistry would once upon a time have been gaudily painted and with

gold embossing, but its now white. It was a gift to the people of Luton from Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III, around 1340 after major fire and the plague had killed many townspeople. Step inside, walk around the font; step out again, walk around it and stop for a moment under the towering arch of the West Tower.

Walk along the nave, the main body of the church, and stand for a moment in the crossing - here the cross shaped form of the church layout is most obvious. Around us are three more magnificent arches. One opens to the chancel with its choir pews and beyond them the sanctuary and altar. The others to the two transepts, distinguished by their stained glass windows. The North Transept window, created in the late 1800's celebrates those responsible



Clockwise from top left:
Baptistry
Barnard Chantry
Ariel view of St Mary's Church
The Wenlock Arch



is unclear, though many hold it to be a leper chapel – the door to the outside would enable lepers, unable to enter the church, to receive communion. Take time to appreciate the fine carved stonework, especially its ceiling.

Across from the chancel is the Wenlock arch. It is described as Europe's finest late Medieval double arch. Another St Marys great! It carries the arms of Sir John Wenlock, resident of Someries Castle who was buried in the tomb under it, after he died in the Battle of Tewkesbury in 1471. It opens to the Wenlock Chapel, full of gems from the churches 900 year life and which we must be sure to visit another time, not least to sit on Queens Elizabeth's seat!

It's been a short visit but hopefully enough to tempt one to come again. And to recognise that abundance of superlative words, the long list of unique features, and the regular evidence St Mary's place on the national stage, all make the church something the town can be proud of! Returning to where we started, to step into St Marys really is to enter a very different world. ●



The Remembrance Day service at the war memorial outside Luton Town Hall in November 1952 was the first to be held there since 1945. This photo shows Jewish ex-servicemen outside the synagogue in Bury Park Road, preparing to parade to the town centre.

History of the Jewish Community in Luton

Sid Rutstein

The membership now consists of one hundred and thirty people and the regular services and social and cultural events continue

The first Jewish family settled in Luton in around 1880 and by 1912 there were about five families living in the town. The first organised Jewish community meeting took place in Duke Street on 23rd September 1923 and it was resolved to form a body called the Luton Hebrew Congregation. Until 1929 services and religious classes were held above a factory in John Street. In 1929 a minister was appointed and a house was purchased at 5 Moor Path and this was converted into a Synagogue which could accommodate about ninety people.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 there were about twenty five families in Luton but this swelled to over two

thousand souls with the evacuees from London. This represented a turning point in the history of the Luton Jewish community and it was apparent that a new Synagogue and Communal Centre were required. So, in 1949, the Empire Cinema in Bury Park Road was purchased. The Empire Cinema had opened as an independent cinema on 29th November 1921. Plans were developed for the conversion of the building and it was consecrated by the Chief Rabbi, Dr Israel Brodie in 1953. At that time the congregation consisted of about two hundred members and regular services were held as well as religious classes and social functions. There was a Youth Club, Young Marrieds' Group, Ladies

Below left: The original glass windows from the Bury Park Road synagogue have been restored and installed at the new place of worship in Dunstable Road; **below right:** the Bury Park Road building before its sale in 2001. Bhavins cash and carry is to the left



→ Guild, Parent Teacher Association and a Friendship Club for older members. By the late 1980's it was apparent that new premises were required. The membership was declining and aging and few members lived near to Bury Park. So, a protracted search was begun to find new accommodation or land upon which to build, and also to identify a purchaser for our building. After many false starts, the Synagogue in Bury Park Road was sold at the end of 2001. The purchasers were the Islamic Cultural Centre, so the

building retained its religious use and the location was much more appropriate for the new owners than it had been for the Jewish community. For the next eight years the Jewish community had a series of temporary homes. These ranged from Luton Town Hall, various community centres and various houses. However, in 2009 a disused doctor's surgery was purchased and work was undertaken to convert it into a Synagogue. On 27th June 2010 the

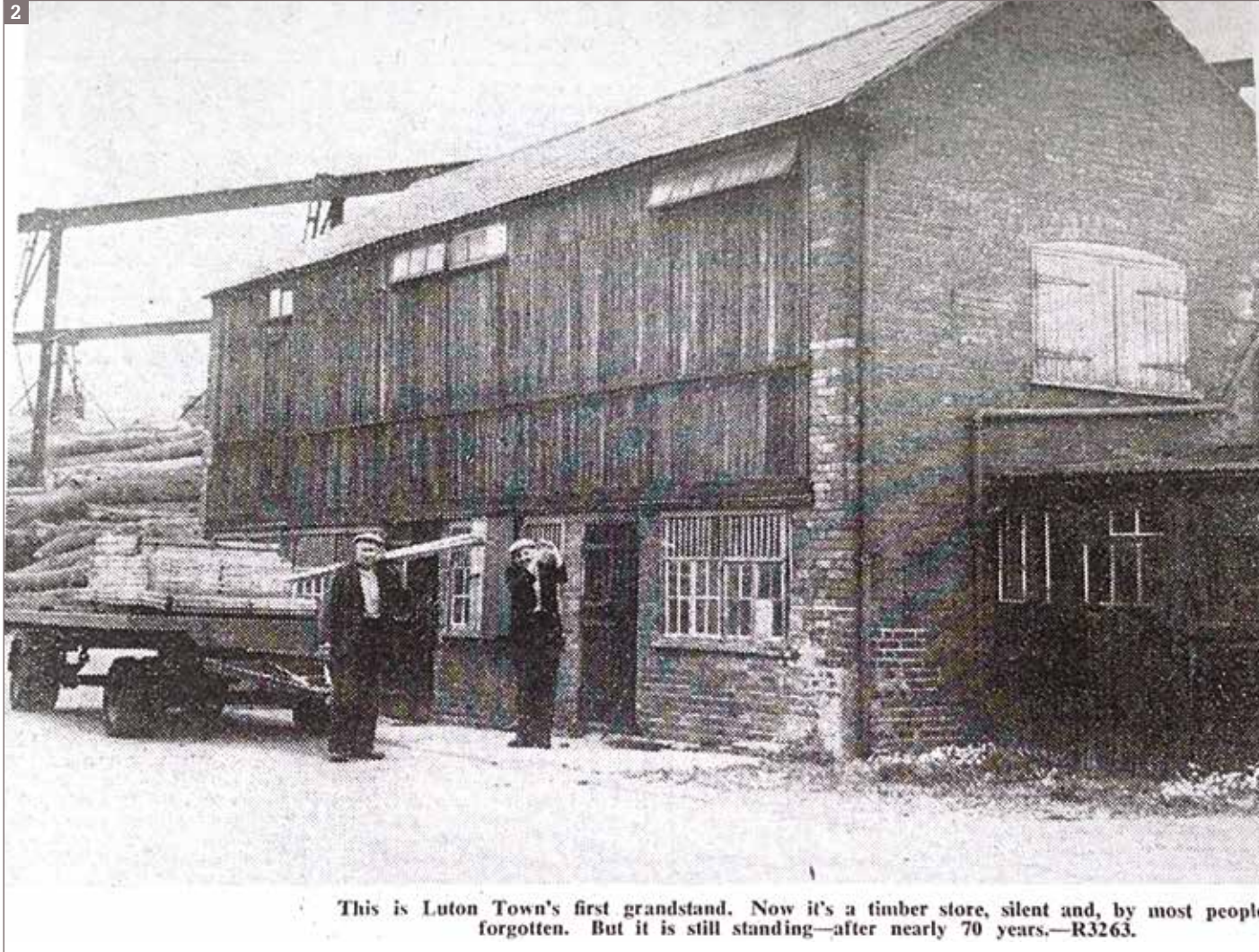
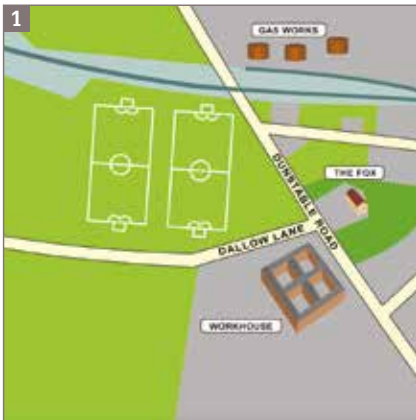
new Synagogue in Dunstable Road was consecrated by the Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks. The membership now consists of one hundred and thirty people and the regular services and social and cultural events continue. Furthermore, It is worth noting that since the appointment of the first minister in 1929, there have been full-time ministers almost continuously up to the present day. ●

Home for the Hatters

The early years of Luton Town Football ground

Brian Webb

The first illustration (image 1) shows the Dallow Lane ground from 1884 to 1887. The pitch nearest to Dunstable Road belonged to Excelsior from 1879 until 1885, then Luton Town from 1885 until 1897. The other pitch belonged to Wanderers from 1884 until 1887. The ends were known as the railway/gasworks end and the Dallow Lane/Workhouse end. The illustrations are not to scale.



After the demise of Wanderers in the spring of 1887, Luton Town had more flexibility in the meadow. A Pavilion was built in the summer and autumn of 1890 and paid for by the brewer, J.W. Green, at a cost of £50. The Pavilion held spectators on the upper tier with changing rooms and a refreshment stall at ground level. Image 2 is a photo of the pavilion, taken in 1957.

The site was levelled in 1890 with cinder paths laid for the crowds who could watch cricket, athletics and cycling. It was also the premier venue in the town for fairs, concerts, dog shows and other events.

In December 1893 a grandstand was built in the position shown in image 3.

The grandstand could hold 400 people and image 4 (on the next page) is the only photograph we have of it. I found this photo in pieces at Wardown Park Museum when working as a volunteer. They allowed me to take it away and restore it.

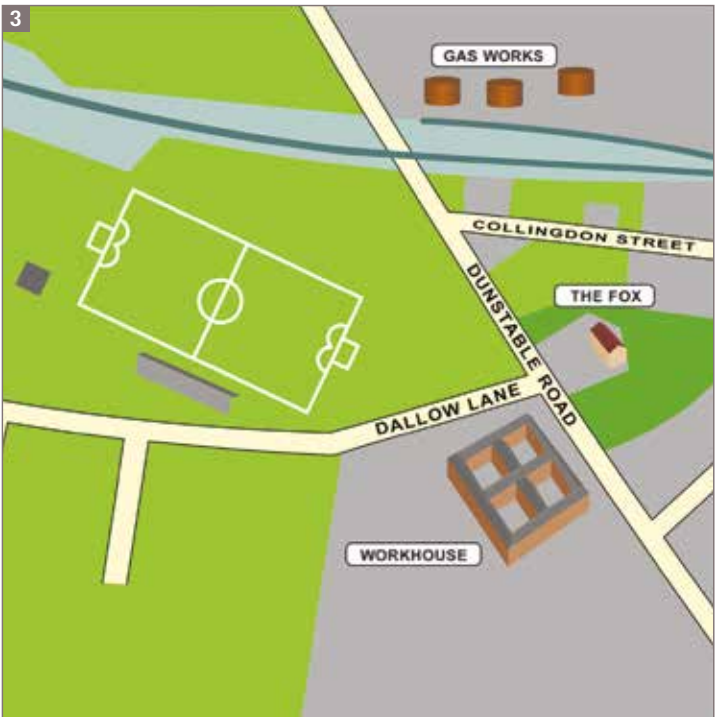




Image 4 is the first known photo of Luton fans and you can just see the outline of the Workhouse in the background.

The pitch in 1894 was 120 yards long by 70 yards wide. With the railway line and Dallow Lane so close, the pitch just fitted the site. The aerial photo taken in 2017 (image 5) shows my best estimate of where the pitch was positioned from 1894.



The Hat Factory Arts Centre reawakened on 6 September, 2019 with a spectacular artistic performance to crowds in Bute Street.



The Hat factory

Past, Present and Future

Celebrating their past in building a new future for Luton's hat factories

PART 1
The Hat Factory
Arts Centre
65-67 Bute Street

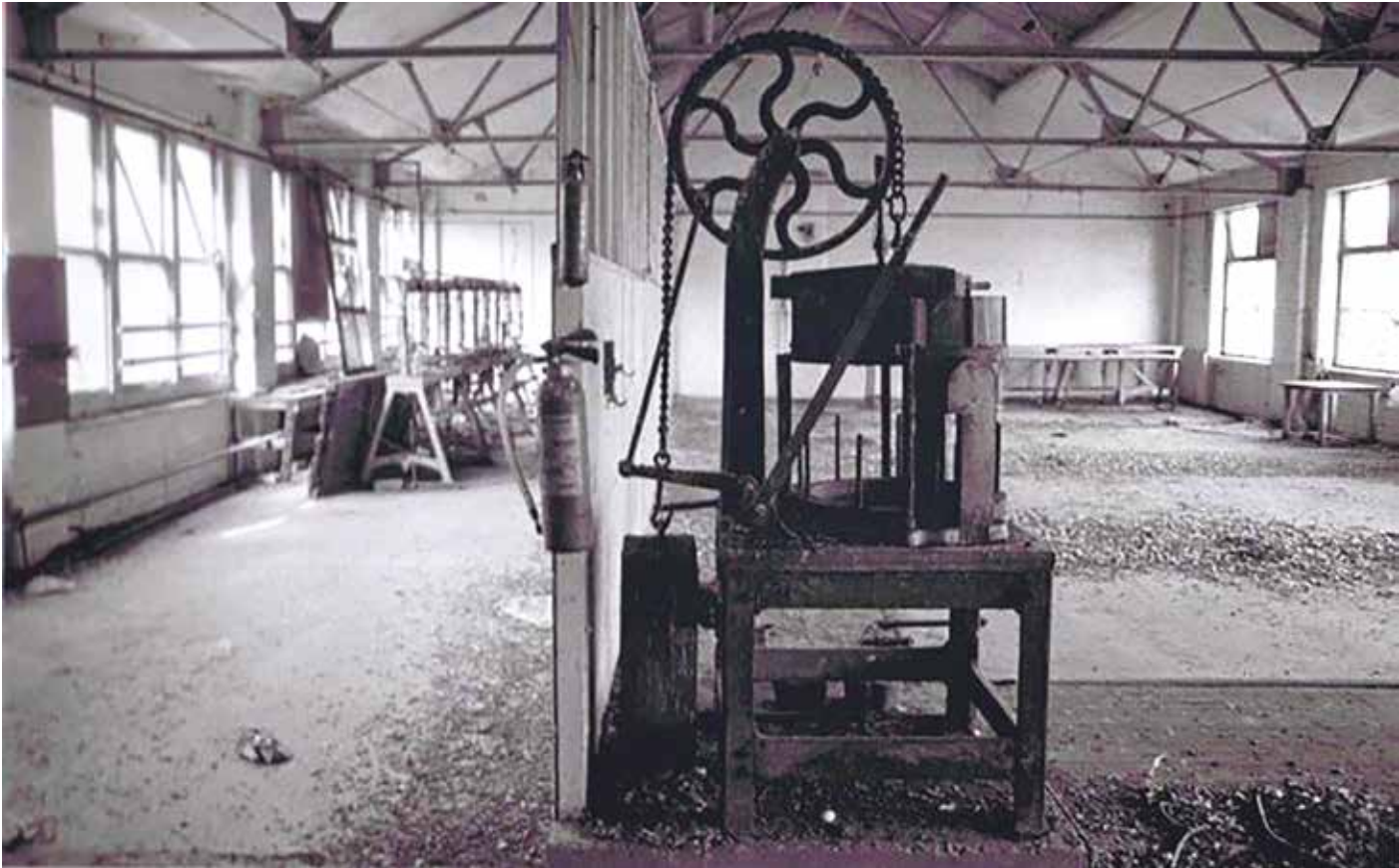
The Heritage Team,
Luton Culture Trust

At its peak in the 1930s, the region was producing around 70 million hats a year

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Luton was known for its car manufacturing with the Vauxhall plant dominating the town. In recent years, one of UK's most successful budget airlines, Easyjet, has helped transform London Luton Airport, putting the town firmly on the map as a top regional airport for passengers travelling to Europe and beyond. But anyone who's joined one of the Luton's history walks or watched the Hats episode of the popular BBC 'Made in GB' series last year will appreciate the town's rich heritage as a thriving international hat making centre going back over 150 years. If you look up to the roof tops, you can't miss the fascinating architecture and distinct brick features, Dutch style parapets and arches on many of the old hat buildings in the Plaiters Lea Conservation area of Luton. At its peak in the 1930s, the region was producing around 70 million hats a year. After the Second World War less demand and overseas competition saw the steady decline of Luton's hat trade but some of the UK's most talented milliners and hatters still create exquisite hats for discerning clients across the world today.



Left: 1920s Advertising pamphlet from the museum collection.
Above: Staff at Egletons in 1991. Copyright A. Stephens.
Below: Part of the unused areas in 1991. The whole building was once used for hat manufacturing but by 1988 only thirteen people worked in the annex. Copyright A. Stephens.
Opposite page: Launch performance event to open the refurbished Hat Factory on 6 September 2019 with crowds outside in Bute Street.



Fast forward to 2018 and we see a cluster of old hat factories being transformed in the town centre. The Culture Trust's ambitious £10m 'Hat District' regeneration project is restoring three old hat factories and building on a new site to breathe new life into conservation area of the town centre to bring new creative opportunities and arts events to the town.

One of Luton's most familiar hat factories: The Hat Factory Arts Centre has just been refurbished and reopened in September offering more accessible arts and cultural events as well as opportunities for talented creatives from the region.

It sits on a busy thoroughfare between Luton mainline station and The Mall. Although the current building was built at 65-67 Bute Street in 1927, records suggest there were other hat factories on

the site. From 1895 –1910 James Higginbottom & Sons, straw and felt hat manufacturers were established there and Gaunt & Hudson Ltd Hat manufacturers are listed at 65/67/69 Bute Street in 1913. The Higgins hat factory was seen in the 1914 Directory of Luton at number 65 while Gaunt & Hudson continued in numbers 67/69. This would have been a prime location for businesses given its proximity to the railway line.

The ladies hat manufacturer: J & K Connor occupied the new building

It will, once more, become part of a growing, vibrant hub in a regenerated Hat District

during the 1920s. They stayed there until the mid 1930s and returned to the premises in 1950s, although the building seems to have been vacant for a time over the Second World War.

Towards the end of the 1950s other companies shared the building including Hubbard's felt manufacturers from 32 Guildford Street, which is now Hat House and is also part of Luton Culture's Hat District regeneration project. By 1963 J. Albert & Co hat makers also shared the building until they moved premises to John Street, around 1974.

During the 1990s the James Egleton hat factory occupied the building.

Egleton supplied well known fashion houses, high street labels and retailers including Jaeger, Planet, Windsmoor, House of Fraser, John Lewis Partnership, Harvey

Opening night of the Hat Factory Arts Centre on 6 September, 2019

Photo: nubsta.com



→ Nichols, Fortnum & Mason. They also supplied Royal Milliners Philip Somerville and Frederick Fox [LVO] with hat shapes. The business merged with the parent company W. Wright & Son Ltd Hat Manufacturers in Hightown Road in 1993/4 where 90 craftsmen and women were already employed.

In 1998 'artezium' was created. This new arts and media hub was conceived by Luton Borough Council for music, comedy, dance and a range of other performances as well as space for creative industries. It was reimagined in 2004 as the Hat Factory regional arts centre offering a theatre, comedy bar, café, office space, education rooms and a vibrant year-round arts programme. In 2015, a new café was opened and named after the historic hat company Connors.

Last year The Culture Trust started an 18 month refurbishment programme of the Hat Factory as part of its Hat District project. This is now complete and the arts centre reopened on 6 September, 2019 with a spectacular launch event.

The newly refurbished arts centre offers unique workshop, co-working spaces alongside its popular visual and performing arts space.

What's more there'll be new creative learning programmes for children and adults. The first Hat Factory bursary artist, Luton based Abi Spendlove, will have dedicated space in the art centre to develop and share her skills and talents with visitors through workshops and exhibitions. Luton's most ambitious young creative entrepreneurs will have opportunities to develop their creative business ideas and

collaborate in the newly refurbished hat factory. The café has re-opened with a simple, fresh menu sitting in the cultural heart of Luton.

The Hat Factory that sits on 65-67 Bute Street in 2019 may have a different purpose to that of many decades before but it will, once more, become part of a growing, vibrant hub in a regenerated Hat District. Communities from across Luton and the region will come together again, this time through an exciting new arts programme and creative work opportunities for all. ●

For more information about The Hat Factory arts centre programme and the Culture Trust go to: www.culturetrust.com
The Hat District project go to: www.hatdistrict.co.uk

Gentleman's walking stick handle



The Fabergé Collection at Luton Hoo

Luton Hoo Hotel

Each egg was individual and beautifully decorated with precious metals and jewel

When I answered an advertisement in a local paper for 'A Clerical Assistant' in 1985 in the Estate Office at Luton Hoo I did not envisage that I would eventually come into very close contact with a wonderful collection of Faberge items on display to visitors in the Mansion House

The Faberge Collection came to Luton Hoo with the marriage of Harold Wernher to Countess Anastasia (Zia) de Torby – Harold was the son of Julius Wernher who formed the Wernher Collection and purchased Luton Hoo in 1903 – the fairly large collection comprised of both useful items and ornaments.

The word Faberge immediately brings to mind large eggs which were originally made for the ruling

Russian Royal Tsarina as a surprise Easter Egg. These eggs were all individual and often contained a surprise ie: one opened to a small chicken sitting inside.

The collection at Luton Hoo did not have a large egg but there was a collection of 40 small eggs on a chain – representing the 40 days of Easter. Each egg was individual and beautifully decorated with precious metals and jewels.

My particular favourite in the collection was a black obsidian bear, beautifully modelled with the bear sitting and his back legs spread wide – you could even see the soles of his feet in minute detail.

In those days ladies would carry parasols – there were exquisite handles in rose quartz and green jade. Similarly gentlemen would



Above: lipstick holder
Right: bell push placed on dressing table
Below: salver with rose gold and diamond handles



Below: jade and gold container – used for special presentation of documents



carry sticks as a fashion accessory – their handles were also neat designs of unusual objects – one was a small jade cockerel with tall tail feathers. It looked strange for a handle but fitted the hand very comfortably.

Another gentleman's handle was a in the shape of a peaked cap – also made out of jade with gold braid too !

A rather special item in the collection was a jade ladies lipstick holder with, on one end, a wonderfully portrayed eye – obviously a ladies eye ! This was then a discreet way of 'flirting' – there was an expression of 'giving a guy the eye' and when then it was fashionable to repair lip makeup in public pointing the 'eye' in a particular direction -

issued a message at the same time!

Among the items were several brooches – of agate and other cut and polished hard stones. These were regularly worn by Lady Zia – matching the brooch to the particular dress or coat she was wearing.

Elephants were a particular favourite of the whole family and there were 'quite a herd ' of them in various hardstones with either diamond or ruby eyes – in various poses – on one leg / trunk raised etc.

There were 3 quite special copies of flowers – set in rock crystal vases – replicating water in the vase. One was a spray of lily of the valley – another was of for-get-me-nots and the third a spray of gypsophillia. All so beautiful and realistic.

Other items were photograph frames and perpetual calendars – these with engine turned fascias all decorated with contrasting swags and coloured hard stones. One set of 3 items were matching in pink

of a calendar / roller blotter / and an 'aide-memoire' notepad used to be on Lady Zia's desk for her correspondence.

Among a few larger items were boxes and cylinder shaped caskets usually of jade decorated with gold swagging - these were often used for the presentation of special documents to dignitaries.

Perhaps the largest item in the collection was a green jade 'salver' with handles of rose gold studded with diamonds and rubies. Probably kept on a table for guests presenting their personal calling cards.

Two other items would have been put onto a ladies dressing table as 'bells' to call her maid – one was

in the shape of a fish – green jade again – with opal eyes which would be pressed to ring the bell on the servants call board elsewhere in the building.

The second 'bell' was a engine turned red enamel globe shape with an opal on top (to press the bell) decorated with swags of gold and this was the 'bell' that was placed in the bedroom of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip when visiting the Wernhers at Luton Hoo. This was a regular occasion – usually in November to celebrate their wedding anniversary. A tradition carried on from their first visit during their honeymoon.

This whole Fabergé collection was

rotated in special cabinets as part of the original Wernher Collection formed by Sir Julius Wernher but remained in the female hereditary line. Having been passed by Lady Zia to her 2 daughters – Georgine (Lady Kennard) and Myra (Lady Butter) who then both in turn passed the collection down to their 8 daughters.

The Wernher Collection is now with English Heritage and displayed at Rangers House in Greenwich.

The Faberge Collection returned to the family after the closure of the Mansion House in 1997.

34 years later I still work at Luton Hoo – now working as Historian for the Hotel – and still enjoy keeping the history of Luton Hoo alive. ●

The Faberge Collection returned to the family after the closure of the Mansion House in 1997



It was not until 1870 that Lutonians started to get a supply of unpolluted water. Before that, the only germ-free cold drinks available for adults and children were ales and spirits. It is little wonder that virtually every street corner had a public house (1 for every 48 inhabitants over the age of thirteen) and that drink-related crime was a serious and increasing problem.

In 1880 a number of Luton businessmen, having heard about The Salvation Army and their remarkable results in London's East End, decided to organise a 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' campaign to offer people alternative forms of refuge and relaxation. The leader of The Salvation Army, General William Booth, was asked if some of his 'soldiers' (members) could help with their campaign. In December 1882 Booth appointed Captain Jim Harris to 'Open Fire' (start up) in Luton.

So successful was that first meeting in the Plait Hall in Cheapside that William Booth decided to establish a corps (base/church) in Luton. Ironically they moved into premises that had once been a brewery!

A second corps was established six months later which initially held meetings in the Alexandra Theatre and then later in premises in Manchester Street. Luton's temperance leaders were pleased with their new colleagues' success, but there were others who were appalled by the Army's abrasive tactics. Every soul 'won for Christ' by the Army was a customer lost to the licensing trade. Publicans were soon up in arms and formed their own opposing army. The wide-brimmed bonnets



Bonnets and Brass

The History of Luton's Salvation Army

Les Stonnell



worn by the ladies became useful shields against the rotten tomatoes, dead cats and other refuse thrown at them during open air services held in Luton's streets.

In 1886, a purpose-built Army Temple was constructed on marshy ground by Blackwater Lane (now Lea Road) – it's very name a reminder of the cholera and other deadly epidemics that were once rife. When the new building was opened by the Army Mother, Mrs Catherine Booth, a newspaper report described it as having: 'an attractive appearance. It has a spacious gallery extending round three sides of the building, and tiers of raised seats ascending from the platform. The front of the building has three entrances, the principal of which is a turreted hall.'

The Salvation Army in Luton prospered despite counter attractions like the Grand Theatre (opened 1898), Luton's first cinema (opened 1909) and the Palace Theatre (opened 1912). By the end of the First World War the Temple corps had 400 senior members and 300 juniors. The Citadel corps in Manchester Street was equally strong.

1919 saw one of the darkest moments in Luton's history, when

Ironically they moved into premises that had once been a brewery!

Opposite page: Number 2 citadel in Manchester Street originally opened as a skating rink but in 1880 opened as 'The People's New Temperance Music Hall and Palace of Varieties Hall', whose name was soon to be shortened to the 'Alexandra Theatre'. The building was later occupied by the Salvation Army, who screened 'animated pictures' (early films) in the building from 1907. It survived the riot in 1919 but was demolished with the construction of the new Town Hall.

Left: Mr and Mrs Day with their children (date unknown)

soldiers returning from the war rioted and burned down the Town Hall, angry at not finding the employment they had been promised. Fortunately, their opinion of the Salvation Army was rather different, and they helped to save the neighbouring Citadel when it looked as if it might be engulfed by the flames.

17 years later, with the building of a new, larger, Town Hall, The Salvation Army had to leave their Manchester Street premises and move into a new purpose-built hall in nearby Alma Street. This was a boom time for the Temple Corps in Park Street, as evidenced by the opening of a third corps in Sarum Road in Leagrave. These premises still serve as an outpost today.

Many returning soldiers at the end of The Second World War were full of appreciation for the way The Salvation Army had supported them. Red Shield canteens and Army cups of tea became the proverbial. At this time the Temple was closed for modifications that included the installation of iron girders to reinforce roof and foundations that had been shaken by passing tanks from the Vauxhall munitions factory.

By June 1999 the Citadel and the Temple decided to amalgamate in order to develop a new strategy for 21st century Luton and to build new premises that were better able to facilitate their service to the community. The new Worship and Community Centre, built on the site of the old Temple, was opened by Commissioner Keith Banks in April 2003. ●

The animated owner of The Engine pub in Bute Street discusses the renovation of this old premises to people on the Plaiters' Lea heritage walk.

