

10.8.78.

A Pyatt

PYATT

J.W. HOWE & F.L.A. 34 Wellington Rd
E.17.

Dear Sir

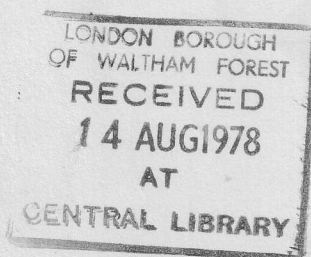
Many thanks for the letter of 9th inst
and your suggestion of recording
my story of the Lea marshes.

I could see you on Tuesday Morning
August 15 at 10.30 a.m. to discuss
same or any time that would be
suitable for you.

my Phone No is 520 0714

I remain yours sincerely

A. Pyatt



I was born in Glenthorne Road Walthamstow, near St. James Street area. This conversation relates to St. James Street and the area as I remember it from 1911 onwards. Passing through St. James Street recently they were demolishing an old building and as they were taking the bricks down ^{it} ~~they~~ had uncovered a sign, stating it was Everetts Bakery, which to my mind was the final scene, the end of a thriving community, that existed in that part of St. James Street, when Everetts stores was a large part of and I, from the year of 1911 did participate in as working in the butchers shop there as a boy from that time onwards. From the station arch through to the beginning of Markhouse Road it was a very busy shopping area, on the station side it was lined with stalls for many years up to the bend by the Coach and Horses. These stalls and shops ~~inclu~~ included most of the requirements for the housewife as it was mostly the custom of the day for the wife to go out and buy the days dinners every day, as the days of the fridge were non-existent, and in that part of St. James Street, the real name, Saint James' Street, there were stalls and shops for everything, including butchers, linen for wear, greengrocery, household goods, and groceries, rabbit stalls, ^a salad stalls, and others. The main shop fronts were Everetts, with stalls in the ~~kerb~~ ^{end}, a couple of which were long egg cases on trestles. These were about five feet long, two foot wide, slatted and filled with white eggs packed in shavings for protection reputed to be imported from China. Whether ^{it} ~~it~~ was ^{so} ~~true~~ or not, they soon sold at sixpence per dozen. The whole scene of that part of James Street from the station back to the Coach and Horses was a busy area, and remembering its early days with the horse traffic and the open top trams to Lea Bridge Road there was always moving activity and a most regular transport service for the people who were living along the Markhouse Road area. I mention trams as no buses were able to get under the bridge until the road was lowered when the trams were taken off by the council who run the transport system. It seems wrong that that area I'm referring to is no more than what seems a depressed area when in the old days it was a thriving ~~palce~~ ^{place}. By the side of the station there was a cinema, St. James' Cinema, and in its early days of the silent films well supported, then on the corner shop by the alley that leads to Brunner Road, was Briggs Chemist, which was very popular with the public. In mentioning the alley I must recall its most usefull purpose served was to cut through to the Colliers Brewery in Brunner Road that was working producing Colliers Ale and the malting smell was a nice ~~smell~~ ^{smell} which was appreciated by some people and hated by others, also the little public house, the Prince of Wales always known as "the Artfull" because of its hideaway position for the thirsty passengers of the City trains. On the other corner of the alley was called the 'walking round shop' so called because they sold all sorts of working class clothing and to be a customer you entered a open fronted, deep shop with all the articles for sale hanging in line from the front to the back of the shop. If we go back to the butchers that was next door to Everetts stores, no. 37 St. James Street, in 1911 as I mentioned I got the job of weekend boy there. Two of my brothers had been there before me when on leaving school they passed on to full-time work, this meant me going two evenings a week to cut newspaper into sheets for wrapping at the counter. This was done over the shop in a five foot high attic, so when you got

settled you worked sitting on the shop ceiling, and for two or three hours sat and slit reams of Lloyds news with a long skewer till you had stack for the weekend and counter. The stack of paper resulting was three or four feet high, even that was barely enough as very little greaseproof was used in those days with meat at a price to suit most peoples purse, from the meat from tuppence happeny to one shilling a pound, then on saturday the boys job, that was me, was to deliver the orders. There was a solid tyred box trycicle and a tradesmens bike. These were too large for an eleven year old and the fourteen year old full time boy used them so it was me walking with a large basket, full of different joints, half bent over with the weight, and resting it on the hip. It was a releif when you could when you could stand up straight and rest at a coffee shop or stall on the way back with a penny cup of tea, and a penny piece of Tottenham cake. Most Saturday afternoons was a large order for The Grange, the big house inside Billet Road. This meant a tram ride from St. James' Street station, usually I could put the basket with the ^{on} tram driver ~~at~~ the front, and get a seat where I could see it, the fare half pence each way. At the end of the tramline at Worcester Road, that was where the rural scene began and on a winters night was real bleak, but in the summer time was as good a country walk as anywhere in England. My walk from the tram stop would be ~~hard~~ hard to imagine these days for at the end of the track was the beginning of a real dirt road. Imagine walking along Billet Lane years before the Council houses were built, there were one or two large houses in their own grounds from the start of the lane. Trees overhung and kept out the sunlight and there was deep ditch on either side of the road. The street lighting which was maintained by the Walthamstow Urban Rural District Council were oil lamps. I mention too in the walk up to the drive to the door of the Grange always got the dogs barking ^{but} and a nice old lady with a tip for the boy always sent him back down the lane with a whistle and a tram ride back to St. James Street. By the time I returned to the shop it was about evening time, that was the time that the ~~area~~ area was getting busy. A Saturday night was the time most people started their weekend shopping and the butchers were clearing out their remaining stocks of meat, selling off cheap and St. James Street and High Street were alive with people. The stalls were now illuminated not with electricity but with parrafin flares hanging from the top of the stall, and what a nasty smell there was when the wind blew one out. My time as a butchers boy carried on for me to become the van driver and carrier for the same firm, namely W.H. Bass & Co. for the next twenty five years, But my recording of the James Street area and its people of that time, and I hope future palnning authorities can restore that area to the close knit community that it was when it was centred around the now demolished St. James Church where the locals were christened and married etc. In closing these memoirs this is just about St. James Street. The other side of the arch towards High Street, and the High Street is another story.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ARTHUR PYATT OF 34, WELLINGTON ROAD, E.17, ON 17TH AUGUST, 1978.

Born 1901

Mr. Pyatt was 77 at the time of the interview and gives his reminiscences of Roe flights and Cobham Flying Circus, and memories of the Marshes, Coppermill Lane School, butcher's business in Walthamstow and early buses.

INTERVIEWER: David Mander.

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INTERVIEWER: You were involved, I understand, in the very early flights that A.V. Roe took over the marshes and you watched these. How did you come to hear about them?

MR. PYATT: Well, it wasn't so much hearing about them as seeing actually what was going on.

As a child, most of my school 'olidays with all the other school boys and girls in my area, we spent best part of our time on the Lea Marshes, at the bottom of Coppermill Lane, and on the second field of the Lea Marshes, around where the railway arches still exist, was one railway arch that when the doors were opened looked like a gigantic workshop. Inside was - whatever it was we didn't really know - it looked to me like a large kite being prepared. I didn't take a lot of notice. I suppose my age then was five, six or seven, round about that area; that would be 1906, 1907.

As time went by us kids did notice that whatever was being built inside the arch, to us, as I say, appeared like a large kite, but soon discovered that it was the building of an aeroplane, something that we never in our life time knew existed or even thought of.

INTERVIEWER: And you say you were about five or six at the time, how often were you down at the Marshes then?

MR. PYATT: I should think, during the summer time always as soon as it was possible. Most of the school 'olidays which, in those days, was the complete month of August, the whole of the 'olidays any time we 'ad to spare was spent down the Marshes. As kids from the Coppermill Lane area we'd take a bottle of water and some bread wrapped up in paper and that would do us for best part of the day and there on the marshes we'd spend our time.

The Marshes in that time, the level of the Marshes were a lot lower than they are today because of the rubble that's been built on 'em from the bombing has lifted the level of the Marshes and they are not the same fields that they used to be. In those days they were real green, lush fields and at least twice of the year the grass used to be cut for the horses and all that in the area and our kids spent most of their time playing about in the hay down there. It was a real hay-field.

As time went by and we kept nosing in the arch where the plane was being built, we did eventually find that it was going to be an aeroplane and having read in the local Waltham Forest review of the request for some idea of recognition of the aeroplane I did think it might be possible to have some sort of painting by art classes or other

MR. PYATT: people in the area, of the area where the artist did exist and p'raps a picture of the plane being sent around the places where the paint is taking place and a picture of the plane superimposed on the top.

INTERVIEWER: What was the hangar area like Mr. Pyatt, when you were round there as a kid ?

MR. PYATT: Well, it was like what my shed is today - full of rubbish. To me it looked like a lot of rubbish but it was all sticks and wires and whatever the plane was made of was large portions of wood - 3 ply didn't exist in those days, but it was sort of cane struts with a skin over the top that was coated with some sort of process that in those days I 'ad no idea what it really was.

INTERVIEWER: Was there much equipment available, tools and benches and things ?

MR. PYATT: Well, there were lots of bits and pieces lying about but in my days of what, five or whatever age I was, I really didn't take a lot of notice of that sort of thing. To me it just looked a man occupying his time in a large workshop.

INTERVIEWER: How many people were there hanging about the site, actually working on the plane or pushing it when you went by - roughly ?

MR. PYATT: I suppose there were three or four men in the area, but as far as pushing the plane was concerned, I remember pushing out when the time had come for it to be moved out of the arch.

INTERVIEWER: So you in fact pushed the plane out ready for a flight ?

MR. PYATT: From the rear, yes, and this, my memory was rather dim about this sort of thing, and I phoned my brother who's three years older than me, living in Bournemouth and told him that I would possibly come and have a talk about this, and he said it was perfectly true, on the day that the plane was taken out of the arch - my father apparently got the information from some where, and he took us both down the Marshes on that particular day, and my brother says that ropes were attached to the plane and pulled out and I still remember, as a kid, being at the back with my hands on it and just giving it a little touch. Probably it never made no difference whatsoever.

INTERVIEWER: What did the plane actually feel like when you touched it ? Can you remember ?

MR. PYATT: It's so long ago, that it's hardly possible for me to remember.

INTERVIEWER: Did you actually witness a flight ?

MR. PYATT: My memory doesn't really go back, but my brother says he did actually see the plane come off the ground. To me, being so young, it was of no real interest as far as aviation's concerned. I thought it was the case of a man spending 'is spare time putting sticks and wires together.

INTERVIEWER: So when you actually pushed the thing you saw it trundle on the ground, presumably ?

MR. PYATT: Yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did it ever attempt to actually, or did it seem to be lifting a bit,

INTERVIEWER: or was it just trundling along on the ground ?

MR. PYATT: To my mind it was still going along the grass, but my brother says that if I'd stopped there long enough I'd have seen it lift off.

INTERVIEWER: And how far along did it actually go from the hangar ?

MR. PYATT: I suppose we pulled it out of the hangar, just clear of the arches, and away it went. Whether it lifted off the ground I really don't know, because in my mind I never understood that it was gonna be the commencement of aviation. I 'ad no idea, all that I knew about, as far as transport was concerned was 'orses and carts, bakers' carts and milk vans.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting that there's absolutely no mention of the flights taking place in the newspapers at the time, or even that anybody was actually flying on the Marshes. What was the reaction of your friends and the people that you knew, to this contraption down by the Lea Bridge area ?

MR. PYATT: Well, most of my friends were young kids like myself and probably thought it was - I don't like to say this - but probably thought it was a crank's idea of trying to do something and getting that to lift off. We knew how much trouble we had with flying kites down in the area, but to try and lift a gigantic plane off the ground, to us, meant nothing.

INTERVIEWER: Now, presumably the plane was actually going towards the Lea itself from the hangars. Did it actually get very close to the Lea at all ?

MR. PYATT: No, it was going in the opposite direction. It run parallel with the Lea. The second field, as we called it in those days, runs many hundreds of yards alongside of the Lea and it was going towards the reservoir that still exists there today.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember at all anything of the pilot, what he was like ?

MR. PYATT: I've no memory of his actual facial, but I do remember a man sitting with his knees in the air and, as all first time motorists did in those days, with his cap on back to front.

As far as aviation's concerned it's development was so fast after that incident and I was too young to understand it until such time as aviation really, to my mind, did come into its own, and my first real contact with aviation was on the occasion when the Alan Cobham Flying Circus came to Low Hall Farm and two or three planes landed on the Marshes - one a very large plane - and I was married by then and my young son and I took a flight with the Alan Cobham Flying Circus, in one of the latest type passenger planes, which incidentally 'ad wicker seats in it like bedroom chairs, two on one side and one on the other.

INTERVIEWER: How many people did the planes hold ?

MR. PYATT: I should think round about twelve or fourteen and they were all local Walthamstow people and one, when we got into the air, on one occasion a friend of mine sitting further down the plane turned round to me to say hello and I said to him, "Sit down, you can't do that in an aeroplane" and it was really, as far as I was concerned, a real historical occasion because Sir Alan himself was the pilot at that particular time and took us for a flight all over the local area.

INTERVIEWER: So you flew all over Walthamstow itself ?

MR. PYATT: Yes, yes, right out as far as Bow Church. I still remember seeing Bow Church from the air.

INTERVIEWER: Were the planes monoplanes or were they bi-planes ?

MR. PYATT: I 'ave a feeling it was a bi-plane - two engine.

INTERVIEWER: Two engines - one on either side ?

MR. PYATT: Yes. A two engine bi-plane.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you in the air for ?

MR. PYATT: Oh, a matter of twenty, twenty five minutes, I suppose, for 7/6d. or thereabouts.

INTERVIEWER: That was quite good value you felt ?

MR. PYATT: Oh yes, yes, wonderful value.

INTERVIEWER: And how many people came to the event ?

MR. PYATT: The Flying Circus ? Oh, the field was crowded. It was a real something to go and see - two or three planes, and since, my last occasion to stand near a plane was to stand under the Concorde at the Duxford Airfield and from the Concorde at Duxford Airfield back to the Avro plane down the Lea Marshes, to me, sticks in my mind.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Pyatt.

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INTERVIEWER: I gather you spent a lot of time on the Marshes. What were the Marshes like in the period round about the first World War ?

MR. PYATT: The Marshes, in the summer time, were the local holiday area, of that there's no doubt. Most families that lived within the area spent most of their picnic days down there. Holidays, people would walk down the Marshes and spend best part of the time and the enjoyment gained down there was the fact there were two Boathouses on the Lea and for the sake of a few coppers you could hire a boat and, for so much an hour, of course, and spend best part of yer time down there.

INTERVIEWER: Where were the Boathouses ?

MR. PYATT: Down the bottom, right down the bottom of the lane on the Lea itself. I think both Boathouses do not exist now.

INTERVIEWER: This is Coppermill Lane, is it ?

MR. PYATT: Yes, but where one Boathouse was is now the Marina.

INTERVIEWER: And what were the boats like, just rowing boats ?

MR. PYATT: Oh, just heavy rowing boats, yes, but there were one or two local clubs down there and you could, if you were a Club Member, there were some good oarsmen down there, you know, rowing past with skips. But it was the object of kids of my area to go down there with a few coppers and 'ave a boat out and 'ave a really good time.

INTERVIEWER: I understand you went to Coppermill School. When were you there ?

MR. PYATT: I went to Coppermill Lane School in 1905, taken into the Infants' School, and from there transferred to the Boys' School. Even in those days there were no Junior Mixed. From the Infants' School girls went to the girls' and the boys went to the boys' and I suppose it was about the age of seven I went to the Boys' School and was introduced to the first teacher, a good old gentleman that people that did exist in my days, will remember as a Mr. Stamp.

INTERVIEWER: What was he like ?

MR. PYATT: He was a lovely old man, lovely old man.

INTERVIEWER: What did he teach ?

MR. PYATT: To the children - the beginning of the three 'Rs' I suppose, just the beginning of the three 'Rs', and I went there from, Coppermill Lane from five till I was fourteen and at the age of fourteen I left and got a fair certificate of education.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything you remember about the school in particular, any little incidents or any sort of things about the school ?

MR. PYATT: Well, the whole of my time there the headmaster was a Mr. Moss, very serious type of man in his days, but I suppose headmasters are supposed to be serious, they were then.

During 1911, I believe it was 1911, when King George V, it was 'is

MR. PYATT: Coronation Day and all of the kids in the area spent their day, that particular day on the Elms Playing Field down there and were treated to free lemonade and cakes and what have yer.

INTERVIEWER: You mean that was lots of children.?

MR. PYATT: Oh yes, the whole of the schools in the area.

INTERVIEWER: And did that go on all day ?

MR. PYATT: Yes, it was a whole day - Coronation Day in the Elms, and while I think of it, the houses that existed down there, the side of the Elms and down the bottom of Sandy Lane, were gorgeous houses.

INTERVIEWER: What was the area besides the Marshes like ? Were there many houses round in the area ?

MR. PYATT: No. There was just one or two houses down the bottom of the lane that I believe 'ad some contact with the reservoir people, that was then the Metropolitan Water Boards, and the chimney of the old Coppermill, from which Coppermill gets its name - Coppermill Lane - still exists, the chimney that was used for the coppermill, whatever was done there.

INTERVIEWER: That was still being worked at some stage ?

MR. PYATT: Well, I wouldn't say it was being worked but the building was still in existence.

INTERVIEWER: And did you work locally after you left school ?

MR. PYATT: Yes, I was the youngest of five brothers and for some reason or other my mother seemed to think that as the brothers were able, they would go and get a job in a shop, which was the thing that most boys did do - you either got a job on a milkman's round, or with a baker or assist in some sort of shop. We all went into a Butcher's shop, and at the age of eleven I started as a Butcher's boy, which meant working in the evenings cutting all the newspaper into strips ready for wrapping the meat.

INTERVIEWER: Did you deliver meat, as well ?

MR. PYATT: From eleven I worked as a boy in the shop and then at fourteen I went into the shop, 'aving left school at fourteen, then I became, I thought, a qualified butcher, but it takes a long time to become a qualified butcher, even in those days.

The firm that I worked for, name of W. H. Bass & Co., had five or six shops in the area by the time that I had finished.

At the age of seventeen the firm bought mechanical motor transport and that was a vehicle called, as far as I can remember, an Isota Francini, and italian, well it would 'ave been an italian Rolls Royce in those days. Well, it was converted from a car to a commercial vehicle with the wheels removed and sprockets put on where the wheels were, chains put to a dead axle at the back, which incidentally was a thick wood axle, thick wood dead axle and from that day I did all the market work for W. H. Bass & Co.

INTERVIEWER: What were the customers like, most of your customers ?

MR. PYATT: Oh, they were really nice people, but my contact with customers, of

MR. PYATT: course, first started when I was about twelve when it was the butcher's boy's job on a Saturday morning to go to the shop and a basket would be filled with orders, almost as heavy as the boy 'imself, and you'd see 'im walking along the road with it resting on his hip it was so heavy, and deliver the meat to different people.

My furthest contact was down Blackhorse Lane to the 'Grange', a big house called 'The Grange' but that meant a ride on the tram; a halfpenny ride on the tram, from James Street Station to Worcester Road, Gloucester Road where the trams ran, and that was the beginning of Billet Lane which was then a really country area with, as far as I remember, the only place that I remember that oil lamps still existed as it became dark.

My whole time at the butchers was a really gorgeous time. Meat in those days was so plentiful that nobody went without meat, the meat at fourpence a pound, as it was in those days. Whenever you 'ad a meal it was always meat.

INTERVIEWER: Was a lot of it locally killed or was it brought in from outside ?

MR. PYATT: Most of it was Argentine, Argentine meat. Argentine was Britains supplier of meat in those days and having lost the Argentine beef trade today, to my mind is the position that we are in as far as meat's concerned.

INTERVIEWER: You were working for the butchers till twenty four. What did you do after that ?

MR. PYATT: I applied for a job with the London General Omnibus Company and they were then advertising in the 'News Chronicle', the paper does not now exist, for five hundred drivers of heavy vehicles, two years heavy vehicle driving, and I got taken on at London Transport and worked in the local Leyton Garage for forty years, as a bus driver.

INTERVIEWER: You experienced quite a few changes during that period, what kind of buses did you start off on ?

MR. PYATT: I started off with a 'B' type, solid tyres, no windscreen, no self-starter, starting 'andle, when it rained you just put a canvas up in front of yer face and when it snowed the snow blocked yer eyes out.

INTERVIEWER: And how long was your route on those early 'B' buses ?

MR. PYATT: Oh, same as they are today, same as they are today, my first route with the 'B' type was from Homerton to Putney on the 22s.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did that take ?

MR. PYATT: Approximately an hour and a quarter, I suppose. The speed today exceeds the speed of years ago, but I think the times were covered just as well, because the motor traffic didn't exist, but traffic was as busy in those days because there was no traffic lights, no control on many crossings, no bus stops other than White Stops, which was an actual stop, and if passengers required their bus they just hailed it in any part of the street and the bus stopped.

INTERVIEWER: You always did stop for them ?

MR. PYATT: Oh yes, yes. The regulations were strict on buses in those days. Yer dress 'ad to be perfect, yer shoes 'ad to be clean, yer white coats 'ad to be white and in the summer time yer hat had to be covered with a white 'at cover, no driver was allowed to work without.

INTERVIEWER: Did the early buses break-down very often ?

MR. PYATT: Not as often as you'd think. From the beginning the early buses were really well maintained because the maintenance of early buses was as much as part of the bus work as the driving, merely because the man in the name of Lord Ashfield knew what he was doing when 'e introduced the London General Omnibus Company as a complete outfit for the buses in London.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do about road works, and diggings up of the road in various stages, what was it like when you were driving in the early days ?

MR. PYATT: I don't think that the road works of today are any more than they were in the days when we first started driving motors on the road, because we competed with trams in those days, and the tramways, mostly cobblestones, had to be maintained and whenever a tramway was being repaired so it meant single line traffic with just enough room for a bus to get through because they usually made enough room for a horse and cart to go through, in those early days. But I do believe that road works were just as busy, in fact, they were perhaps busier in those days because the new style of roads were being introduced. Wood blocks were then one of the roads that were made and they did find, I believe, that they were such a serious hazard as far as skidding was concerned, that they were removed and when the tarmac came into existence most roads were tarmaced with the skid-proof top that they put on today.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any rivalry between you and the tram-drivers ?

MR. PYATT: Well there was a little bit of rivalry because the - it was all in good fun really - because eventually it all came together. We 'ad to be pals in the end, but as far as the trams and buses were concerned there were occasions where a bus 'adn't room to pass a tram because the trams pulled in to the side of the road, but you did your best to get in front of the trams so that you wasn't held up by him. But the trams were a god-send in the days of the London fog. If you got behind a tram you knew that 'e would take you where you'd wanna go, providing 'e wasn't going on a different route to you, then you'd find yourself in the wrong place.

INTERVIEWER: Could that ever happen ?

MR. PYATT: Not really, no, it didn't happen. My earliest incident of not knowing my way, I suppose, was on the 15 service, I was driving a 'B' type bus on the 15 service from Forest Gate and I knew my way all around East London, but when I got to - we always turned around the little turnings where the buses turn there - myself and the Conductor, that were both new to the job, 'ad no idea where we were, so on the first stop I said to a schoolboy, "Do you know where these buses go ?" he said "Yes", so I said, "Well come and sit up 'ere with me" and I gave 'im a free ride and we found ourselves at the end of the 15 route.

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