



SHIRLEY HERITAGE PROJECT

NEWSLETTER

FoSJP
Friends of St.James' Park



APRIL 2011
ISSUE 3

Postcards

by Peter Wardall

Readers of the Heritage newsletter will have seen the postcard photograph of St.James' Park posted in 1920 but probably photographed around 1913, when it was known as Shirley Recreation Ground.



In the early part of the 20th Century, postcards became the texting equivalent, for Edwardians of all classes with postage costing just a halfpenny. Subjects varied from Greetings, Comic, Christmas, Art cards, to Local View cards. When the craze took off in the early 1900s, millions were sent, often with a reply arriving on the same day in towns with frequent postal services such as Southampton. The huge number of cards that were sent meant that a great number still survive and are now collectors items.

Luckily the early postcard of Shirley Rec was spotted and purchased by a member at a local postcard fair, otherwise it might have been lost from public view forever. Many other local postcard views are now held by FoSJP and cover areas around the Park and Shirley in general. The cards give the opportunity for us to produce "Then and Now" images.

A selection of previously unseen Edwardian Shirley images including Church St, Winchester Rd, the view from St.James' Church tower, St.James' Rd, and other views will be displayed on our stand at the Bitterne Local History Society Fair at Townhill Park House on Saturday 16th April.

Diary Dates

Saturday 16th April

SOUTHAMPTON HISTORY FAIR

10am - 5pm

Townhill Park House,

Bitterne SO18 2GF

Local history stalls, garden tours, public talks, crafts, exhibitions including FoSJP History Stall; entrance £4 (children free)

Sunday 22nd May

FOYES CORNER FESTIVAL

11am - 3pm

behind St.Mark's School, Shirley

Including FoSJP History Stall

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Forthcoming Autumn 2011 Series

If you missed out on the recent series of public talks which finished in March, do come along to the Autumn 2011 series.

They will be on the first Sunday of the month in October, November, and December, in Shirley Parish Hall, 3.00pm - 5.00pm.

Posters will be displayed in Shirley before the events and further details can be found nearer the time on FoSJP's website: www.fosjp.org.uk.

A Head for Heights?

The lengths - or heights - we'll go to!

David Hazelwood, Vicar of Shirley Parish - St.James' Church, kindly granted Peter Wardall special permission to photograph Church St from the Church Tower, to gain a "Now" picture to match a "Then" early 1900s postcard image.

Pictured here are Shirley Parish Office representative Theresa Bowen, FoSJP Chair Nichola Caveney, Solent University artist Sarah Silverstein, and FoSJP History Group Member Peter Wardall.



Photo taken firmly on ground level by Michaela Lawler-Levene

75th Anniversary of the Spitfire

Saturday 5th March 2011

On 5th March 2011, Southampton celebrated the 75th anniversary of the first flight of the Spitfire. Designed by RJ Mitchell, the Spitfire's first test flight, from Eastleigh Aerodrome, took place in 1936, flown on that memorable day by Captain Joseph "Mutt" Summers.

75 years later, to the cheers of the crowd lining the Solent, female pilot Carolyn Grace flew her Grace two-seater Spitfire along the flight-path from Eastleigh Aerodrome to Southampton, along the Solent to the Royal Victoria Park, and back to Eastleigh. Carolyn, a truly graceful 58-year-old lady, learnt to fly after her Spitfire-owning husband died in a car crash in 1988.

Interviewed on the BBC, Carolyn commented on how exciting it was to stand on the same ground from which the Spitfire took its first flight. She clearly enjoys and loves the plane, considering it to be an iconic aircraft that has stood the test of time. She considers it the "best" aircraft to fly. Carolyn emphasised that it was truly an historic moment and she was "so honoured" to be involved with it.

At the time of going to print, Carolyn's interview can be viewed at www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-12655848.



The Grace Spitfire flies past Mayflower Park, photo captured by Dan Levene

Sadly, RJ Mitchell didn't see how popular his design was to become, or the role it was to play in the Battle of Britain during WW-II, as he lost his battle with cancer in his early thirties, just one year after the Spitfire's maiden flight. His work was continued by his colleague Joseph Smith.

"Mitchell's Wings"

The life of RJ Mitchell

The life of RJ Mitchell has been researched by local playwright (and FoSJP Committee member) Johnny Carrington. Johnny interviewed RJ Mitchell's son Gordon and members of the crew's family, and cleverly scripted Mitchell's work into an amazing and moving play, Mitchell's Wings, which intertwined the development of the Spitfire with the personal stories of those involved with its

production. Mitchell's Wings was produced with the Maskers Theatre Company and the Oasis Youth Theatre Group, bringing together different generations.

The play, with lyrics by Mark Wheeler and music by Paul Ibbott, was performed as part of Southampton's 75-year celebrations at the Solent Sky Aviation Museum, the Oasis Academy, and the Museum of Army Flying. The play received rave reviews, so a big thumbs-up of support to Johnny and all involved.

FoSJP Member Cindy Phillips who attended the event at the Solent Sky Museum, said:

"It was inspiring and very moving - it brought local history alive and made me feel patriotic and PROUD to be English."

In the Autumn of 2011, Johnny will be giving a public talk on how he crafted his research into such an amazing play. This will be a ticketed event with limited numbers; further details will be released in June.

If you'd be interested in attending this public talk, please email us on history@fosjp.org.uk or call Michaela on 023.8034.4652.



image created by Danny Sturrock

FoSJP's Tribute to the Spitfire

Public Talk - Sunday 6th March

FoSJP's tribute to the 75th anniversary of the Spitfire was the sharing of personal memories of local Spitfire production at the 6th March Public Talk. Following the bombing of the Supermarine Works at Woolston on 25th September 1940, with the loss of over 100 lives, the Air Ministry dispersed Spitfire production: in Southampton alone to 28 locations, employing 3,000 people. Don Smith worked in one such location, at Auto-Metalcraft on Emsworth Road, Shirley, where they produced the Jettison Tank for the Spitfire, the Spitfire Airduct, and Torpedo Boat Ventilator. Don went on to describe seven further small workshops, located close to the park, that were assigned to Spitfire production.

A member of our audience remembered that his father had been based on fire duty at the Hants and Dorset Bus Depot, at

239 Winchester Road, which had been taken over by the Fire Service, but with just 24 hours' notice the Fire Service had to vacate the building for Spitfire production. It was fascinating for our audience to learn of the role that Shirley Parish Hall played in Spitfire production during WW-II, as Don described in detail how they had re-fitted the hall for this purpose.

Mrs Vicki Cooper had been invited to the event. Her husband had worked at Supermarine and when it was bombed he was transferred to Trowbridge, Wiltshire. Not wanting to be left out, she opted to go with him. The only snag was that they wanted her also to work in the factory producing Spitfire parts. She had the audience in stitches when she recounted that she hadn't a clue how to use tools, but she was handed a rivet gun and told to get on with it! She giggled as she

reminisced that her friends had commented that they were sure to lose lots of planes if she was working on them.

Stuart Glennie, who attended many of our talks, comments:

"I can certainly say the last talk was quite amazing, to listen to the reminiscences on the tape and then find the chap in the audience adding another 3 pennyworth with the help of other people who had their own memories was brilliant."

I particularly liked the lady who said she was handed a rivet gun and told to get on with it ("the only lady awarded the German Iron Cross!" - this was a joke from the audience).

As a newcomer to Southampton it was fascinating to know where all the little workshops did their bit in the war."

FoSJP Public Talks

Your Feedback

Vicki Stacey and her mother-in-law, Bet Stacey, have attended both series of FoSJP talks; they shared these comments about the last series with us. Bet said:

"Having the opportunity in recent years to learn about local history has brought home to me the need to keep records of past events for future generations. Not just records of historic happenings and events but personal experiences. I felt that most acutely when listening to the recorded experiences of Don Smith during and after the air raids on the Supermarine factory. These personal memories will be fascinating for future generations. Locally, as in many other communities at that time, there was a real

and passionate need to pull together for the war effort and that was highlighted in the talk. Well done for giving us that brief insight into the lives of local people: especially so, because the church hall at St.James' was used as a mini factory for Spitfire production. I could stretch my imagination back to the past thinking of young girls working together to make parts of the aircraft, which ultimately played such a huge role in the Battle of Britain."

Vicki added:

"Thanks for another fascinating series of local history talks organised by FOSJP. These have provided an insight into the community I live in and have helped me to look at some of my 'everyday'

surroundings in a new light! I've particularly enjoyed listening to the very personal memories from the older generation who experienced many of the changes and events discussed. In particular, it was a very moving experience to listen to Don Smith's account of his memories of Spitfire production in the Shirley area. The way in which he described such amazing events as 'ordinary', for that time, gave a real sense of the true spirit of those people who lived through the war period. To be sat in the very Church Hall, which was used as a 'mini-factory', added to the experience and helped to bring it alive. Thanks again & I look forward to future talks!"

Letters to the Editor

My Dad the ARP Warden

"With reference to Shirley Rec, I am Shirley born and bred: now 70 years old. I have just picked up on your website: I find it very interesting. I note you mention the Kiosk (ARP block): [after WW-II] this was used as lady & gent toilets, the changing rooms for the football teams playing matches on the park and the park keeper used it as his office and store room.

My Dad was an ARP warden in WW-II. I asked him once what did you do in the war Dad, he took me to the ARP control room on the rec where he reported for his watch, now that building was on the Wordsworth Rd side of the rec half way along, at the bottom of the steps leading down into the park. This was also used after the war by the police, they used the phone in a locked cupboard on the outside of the building to report back to Shirley police station while they were on patrol. I hope this is useful for the history of the rec."

Editor's note: Prior to the ARP building which is still in the park, from Mick's letter we see that the ARP were using the emergency phone building which has since gone.

"I would be delighted to have my memories put to any cause about Shirley Rec, I have attached a photo of my Dad's football team, on the Rec, approx 1910/11. The team were called St.Mary's, I have been told they took on that name when the present Saints changed to Southampton from St Mary's. My Dad was Tom Masters, born in 1887 (WW-I navy veteran). My dad is front row first one in white left hand corner. I am at present going through boxes of old family photos taken around Shirley any I think will be of interest I will send on to you, or any information you think I may be able help with, I will be glad to help.

Good luck with the Rec project Mick Masters"



St.Mary's Football Team, 1910/11

The Rose Garden

During and after WW-II many people remember how lovely the rose garden area was maintained. Thanks to Irene and Derek Doswell, we now have a colour photograph of the Rose Garden, which includes the cherry trees, taken back in 1967. This will be featured on the FoSJP website and included in our forthcoming book about the park.

Our furthest enquiry to date!

This enquiry came all the way from Canada:

"I wondered if you could provide me with some history of The Sheltering Home of Industry for Girls, Wordsworth Road, Shirley, Southampton? I don't know what it was, why someone would be resident in the establishment, etc. My half-aunt, Gertrude Alice Thorpe, was listed on the 1911 census as being in residence at this establishment at the age of 7.

Many thanks.

*Dinah Cruse-Hunter,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada"*

Dr Mary South, who has been conducting research into the home, responded to Dinah. Here is an extract from her response:

"The aim was to provide a home for young girls considered to be 'at risk'. They were mainly trained to go into domestic service, when they were aged approximately 14 years. One girl, at least, joined the Missionary Society and went abroad when she was old enough. Around 1902/3 the Home moved to Wordsworth Road."

Michaela, on behalf of FoSJP added:

"The Home (which is where the Barnado's Home was situated on Wordsworth Road), overlooks St.James' Park, which when your Aunt Gertrude attended would have been called Shirley Recreation Ground. In fact, in 1911, the Recreation Ground was just being levelled and finished. It had been a gravel pit and was bought by our municipality, (the Council), and converted to a place where children could play. I would hope that your half-aunt would have been allowed some time on the Recreation Ground and could have been one of the first children to use the park."

Dinah replied:

"Hello Mary and Michaela, Can't thank you enough for your prompt and so informative responses to my query. Isn't the internet a wonderful tool?

Warmest regards,

Dinah"