

## HENLEYS AT MILTON COURT - FROM WAR TO PEACE

*Last year's Annual Report featured an article entitled 'Milton Court in Wartime' which described life as it had been for the staff of Henleys after they had been moved from London to Milton Court on the outbreak of war. The article had been written after we had been loaned Henleys' house journal (the Henley Telegraph) for the years 1939 to 1942. Subsequently we were given a complete set of issues up to 1954 which now enable us to complete the story of their stay at Milton Court.*

In early 1943 the Telegraph reported that the company had taken a lease on offices at 51-53 Hatton Garden. The company's head office in Holborn had been destroyed in the 1940 blitz and the new lease enabled some staff to move back from Milton Court to London; this was probably welcomed by those whose families still lived on the other side of the city. The Telegraph noted that the new offices had a literary association – 52 Hatton Garden had been the police station where Oliver Twist was charged with stealing Mr Brownlow's handkerchief.

Back at Milton Court the Home Guard was very active. The Telegraph recorded that 'the early days featured a lot of 'hard work constructing - and demolishing - strong points....for the local military authorities seemed to have difficulty making up their minds where these should be sited' – shades of Dad's Army! Contrary to its BBC image, the Home Guard was a formidable defensive force. Local units took part in exercises with regular troops, including the Canadian Black Watch; they held summer camps near Milton Court and evidence of this can still be seen on Milton Heath today.

Social activities continued apace, not always for the purpose of light entertainment. In January 1943 the Milton Court Social Club held a meeting to discuss the Beveridge Report. This was to lead to the setting up of the welfare state and the meeting is an interesting example of how the Government consulted the public and gained their reactions. The discussion was led by Mrs Dunsheath, the wife of Dr Dunsheath, Director of Henley's Telegraph Works. She was a remarkable lady who later led one of the first women's climbing expeditions to the Himalayas.

In its summer issue of 1943 the Telegraph reviewed a booklet issued by the Ministry of Health on 'How to Keep Well in Wartime' (H.M.S.O., price 3d). It said: "Another overworked social custom is smoking. Tobacco may soothe the nerves, but it may also spoil the appetite and irritate the mouth, throat and lungs. For the ordinary man and woman good health will not be theirs unless they smoke in strict moderation." Quite a contrast to the official view today.

A notable event for the Henley Choir came in April 1944 when at Dorking County School they gave the first public performance of Vaughan Williams' choral setting of 'Greensleeves'. To mark the occasion the composer dedicated the work to the choir and presented them with 50 copies of the score, although the Oxford University Press had to state that 'through difficulties of paper supply some time would elapse before the printed copies would be available'.

The Henley Dramatic Society was also very active in the district and profits went to charity. Notable productions were J.B.Priestley's 'Laburnum Grove' and 'The Housemaster' by Ian Hay. The latter was put on at North Holmwood as well as The

Hut at Westcott. Alan Brewer who later became Westcott's scoutmaster was both producer and actor in these performances and among the credits for 'The Housemaster', Mrs Leslie Howard was thanked for her 'invaluable help with the make-up'.

Despite paper restrictions the Henley Telegraph was published without a break throughout the war. It was an important focus for employees serving in the Forces and many wrote about their experiences. Most were about their travels abroad; rarely did they talk about the war itself and only then in a humorous vein. At the end of the war a special edition was issued to pay tribute to those who did not return; 62 employees lost their lives on active service and a further seven died when a flying bomb hit the Woolwich works in 1944.

At the end of the war the Telegraph featured articles describing two special contributions that the company had made to the war effort. The first was the production of "de-gaussing" cables to protect ships against magnetic mines. The second was the major part played by the company in the development and manufacture of PLUTO, the undersea pipelines which kept the allied armies supplied with petrol and other fuels after the D-Day landings.

The PLUTO story is especially interesting. In 1942 Admiral Mountbatten asked if it was possible to lay a pipeline across the English Channel. The oil and cable industries got together and after many experiments, including tests across the Bristol Channel, made the pipeline in 700 yard lengths - Henleys developed the lead alloy tubing and made the all-important connecting joints. After its success at D-Day the network was extended as the allies progressed. Pipelines were laid between Dungeness and Boulogne and eventually went on through Antwerp, Eindhoven and into Germany where they delivered a million gallons a day, a remarkable technical achievement.

In 1945 Dr Dunsheath, mentioned earlier, became President of the Institute of Electrical Engineers. A prolific author in his professional field, he was a man of many parts. In 1949 he gave the Christmas lectures to children at the Royal Institution. The series was televised and he 'enthralled his audience with mince pies cooked by high-frequency electric currents' - an early demonstration of the microwave. On the governing body of London University he supervised the election of the Queen Mother as Chancellor. He took up water-colours with great success, lived near Friday Street and one of his pictures of the village was exhibited by the Royal Watercolour Society.

With the onset of peace, the Company returned to peacetime production and normality. The Telegraph concentrated primarily on staff activities reporting appointments, retirements as well as sport, dances and other social occasions - the annual fete at Milton Court was a major event. The journal also featured articles contributed by staff and announced major contracts - one was for the supply of cabling for the Royal Festival Hall in 1951.

The winter edition of 1952 featured the retirement of 'Pop' Mansey, the Head Gardener at Milton Court, who had tended the gardens for 47 years and done so much to help the company settle in during those difficult days of 1940. 'Pop' Mansey, who was succeeded by his son George, sadly died in 1955 and a seat was placed in the grounds to his memory. Although the seat has now gone, the plaque has been kept and

is mounted on a wall on the site of the greenhouses where he spent much of his working life.

Henleys continued at Milton Court until 1965 when they sold the property to National Employers' Life Assurance, subsequently NEL Britannia, who in 1990 were taken over by UNUM. When the 1965 sale took place, the Lordship of the Manor of Milton which for many years had been held by the successive owners of Milton Court, was transferred to Dorking (now Mole Valley) Council with whom it remains today.

***Peter Bennett***

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