



# The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society

(Founded 2012)

## BRIDGE CONTRACT

Julian McCarthy

My mum would say “Wave at the driver! Wave!” and then a movement of the hand would lead to a deafening whistle, followed by the ground rumbling as if thunder was emanating from the ground and then smoke was everywhere!

Many years pass.....and in the early 1990s I was fortunate to have become the father of two boys. So on Sunday mornings I would set out, initially with our first son and then with both with the aim of ‘handing down’ or hopefully implanting a similar memory of the past.

So where would YOU go in New Malden to look at trains coming and going and being able to wave at the drivers? To the station? – No!, to the level crossing at Elm Road?, No- they cannot see you as they approach! I am sure that you, as I, will know of only one place to go. I would assume that you would now be thinking of a view like these:



Before all the trees!

1962

Photo from <http://www.germansteam.co.uk/1962/Schools/Schools.html> (No copyright infringement intended)



2014



How many parents through the years have, I wonder, walked up Dukes Avenue or Alric Avenue with their children to watch the trains. How many of us 'big kids' have stopped at the bridge and have unashamedly waved despite being unaccompanied – other than the child inside! I can vouch for one at least!

I have no doubt it would be in the hundreds, maybe even the low thousands and yet, sadly, the views and the opportunity to wave is no more! It appears that as part of the recent refurbishment of the bridge someone (did I hear Health and Safety?) has decided that the danger of a child becoming so excited and leaping from his or her parent's arms onto the top of the train in Richard Hannay or James Bond style, is too great and hence the sides of the bridge must be raised. Alternatively, it may be an attempt to thwart any future intent to throw Lidl or Waitrose shopping trolleys onto the line?

So instead of this view.....





we now have.....



“Look Julian, a train is coming!  
What’s that? You can’t see it?  
Well wave anyway!”

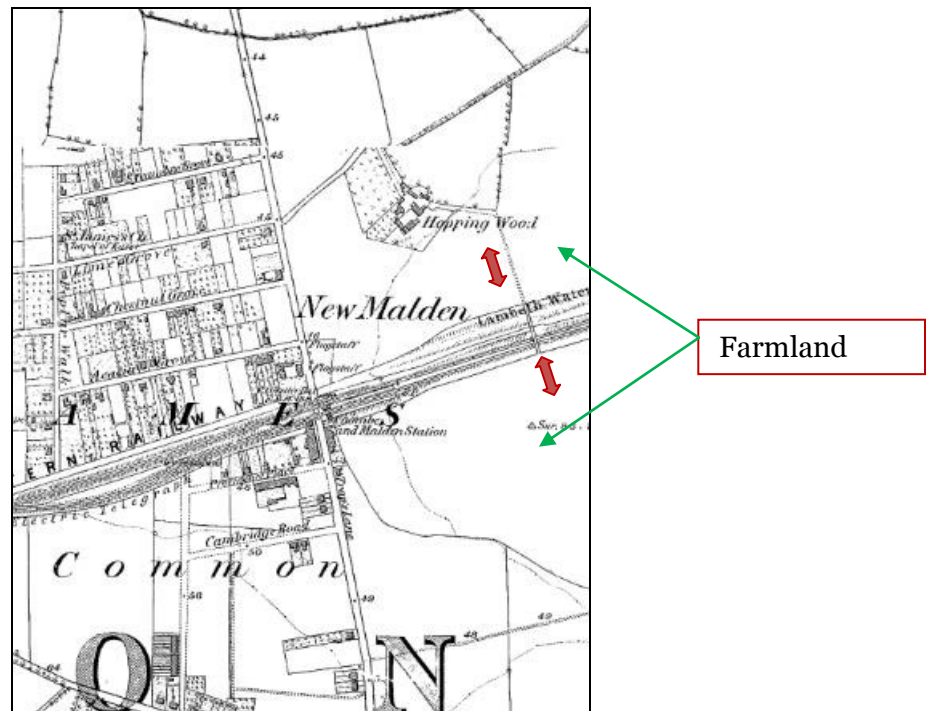


“Too late!  
Sorry, but he just didn’t see you!”

and what once felt like an open area has now, to my mind, become somewhat of a cross between a metal Berlin wall and the High Street on Barry Island, South Wales after the shops have closed.



Gone then are the days when the farmer from Hoppingwood farm would cross the rail line by this bridge after the 1838 and 1869 railways had separated his farming land. This bridge was built, I gather, to maintain the farmer's access and appears on early maps.



So what, if anything, remains of what the farmer may have seen? Well, there is actually quite a formidable tree on the approach to the bridge from Alric Avenue and it must have been here for some time.



I am not an arborist (though sometimes people may think the second syllable apt) and have no idea of its age or type/ species but it is a grand tree. In the background and centred on the path is another tree that people walk by, many having no idea why it is there other than it being a tree in the middle of a grassy plot.





So, what is it you ask. Well, a tree was placed here on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1961 to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Borough of Maldens and Coombe.



*Charter Celebrations.  
 25 years a Borough  
 Tree planted Alice Avenue  
 end of railway bridge  
 Mayor  
 councillor Isitt, Messenger, Lodge  
 30th September 1961*

But Julian, you say, this looks a lot younger than a 54 year old tree! And of course you are correct.

In an unconscious effort to eradicate all trace to the borough of Maldens and Coombe, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames dispatched a refuse lorry one day and long ago which then apparently and wholly inadvertently, reversed into the original tree. (Unless of course an arborist out there can vouch for it being the original tree- which I doubt.

(I was going to say that I *Planely* doubt but I thought that you would be Sycamore Chestnut puns.)



Returning to the bridge contract, it is sad to see something that we daily give no thought to and so take for granted will always be there, in this case a simple view of the trains, suddenly disappear with no word of its intended departure. One week there IS a view and the next – it is gone and with no word from the dummy who dealt us the hand.

The little boy inside me would have liked to have had one more look, wave and have heard a whistle in reply.