



The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society

(Founded 2012)

CHIM-CHIMNEY

Julian McCarthy

I live in Blagdon Road and when we moved here, from the 'far away' Kings Avenue, I wanted to find out what I could about my house and the road. An early mental stirring of what is known locally as 'Gill-ism', or if it isn't – it *should* be!

I checked the local history books available at the time and found two references these being 'Blagdon Farm' and 'Norbiton Potteries' and that was it. No reference did I find at that time of 'plucky little Malden' and the intent to bring Richmond's sewage to Blagdon Road. I suppose we *could* call it the affluents' effluent.

I checked Kelley's directories to see who had lived in our house and whether or not it had a 'house name' before being numbered- it didn't.

I found that the house was once occupied by Mrs Turk but I haven't checked, as yet, if she was in any way related, by marriage, to the boat building family. I never met her and therefore have no idea but I often picture her husband (who, for want of a better name, we shall call Mr Turk!) as a distant cousin who disliked water and so stayed in land from the river and, at best may have built little toy boats for the pond they had in the back garden which, though destroyed by the people we bought the house from, seems to churn up bricks in our lawn every now and then. No sign of any boats but, the strange thing is that, every time I see a patch of lawn yellow and die and I dig down and find part of a pond, I think of boat building! Well, in truth, I don't as much think of *boat building* as simply parts of a boat saying "Oh Rollocks!" or "Bulwarks!".....under my breath! (It's ok, it is not rude- they are parts of a boat aren't they?!)

So nothing much about Blagdon Road until a local publication of old photos and resurgence of Gill-ism. It said 'Norbiton Pottery, Blagdon Road' in the pamphlet. "Wow!", I thought, "I wonder what the house looked like?" I opened the pack and saw.....



..... there's a lake so, perhaps, "Rollocks, Mrs Turk!" (an understandable sentiment considering).

So there we are, living in Blagdon Road and getting on with life. There is talk of demolition of the cottages opposite our house. I have only been in them once, when one of the tenants called for help as their pipes in the roof had frozen and then thawed. I didn't once give thought to the history of the cottages and any association with the pottery.

Time passes and knowing my interest, my mum and dad see an article in the Surrey Comet, they request a copy and give me a framed picture of Blagdon Road for Christmas. You know the one.....



....it's the picture of Blagdon Road, taken from the chimney of Norbiton Potteries and has some nice details.

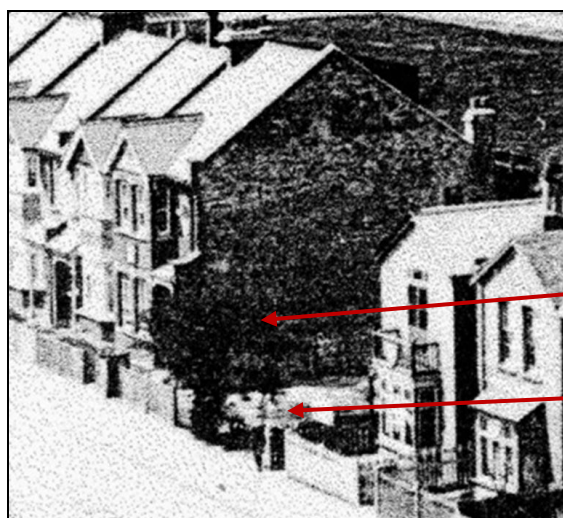
For instance, there is the man on a bicycle, leaning against a lamp post at the far end of the road by the junction with Howard Road. There is a horse in a field to the left:



There is the cameraman with tripod in the yard of the pottery and the lady in a smock by the back door:



...and what about my house?We have a picture of Blagdon Road, it must be there!



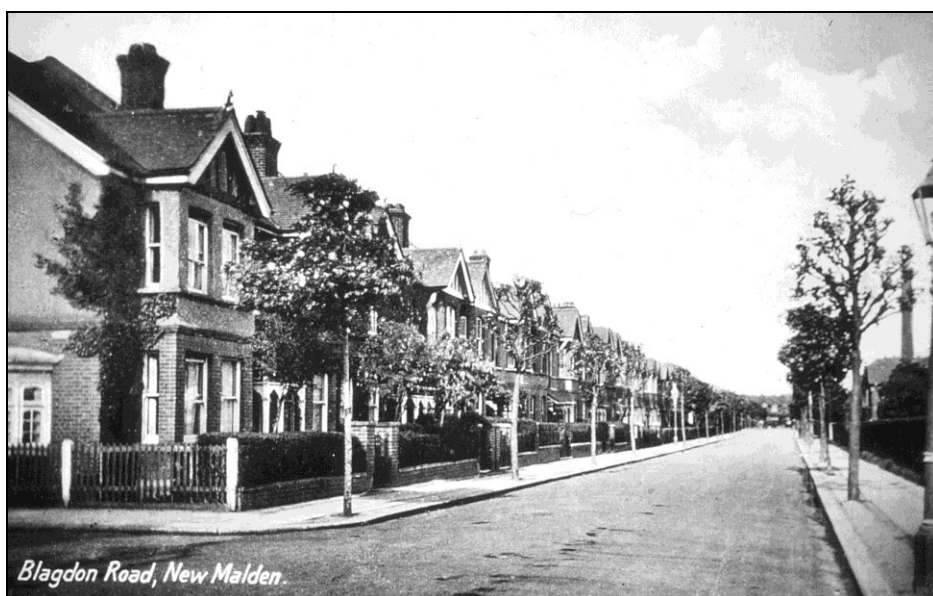
Tree

Girl

My house? Well, can you see the gap between the houses about halfway along the road, with the tree that a girl with a summer hat is about to walk by? If I tell you that the house on the left of the gap is No. 48 and the house after the gap is No. 54 (and our house is No.52) then you'll understand my continuing reference to the things the Turk family would fit on their rowing boats for oars to be secured with.

I liked the picture from the outset and really the absence of our house is ironical but equally interesting as the clear land immediately behind probably meant a quick 'cut through' the open plot to Coombe Gardens and Howard Road beyond.

Many years pass and I was then handed a further photo of Blagdon Road, this time looking from the junction with Howard Road.



There on the right is the lamp post that the man on the bike was resting against in the earlier picture and there, in the background on the right, between the lamp post and the small tree is the chimney of the pottery which the photographer had scaled. My house *is* there – but behind a tree! (Where else would it be – but not in view?!)

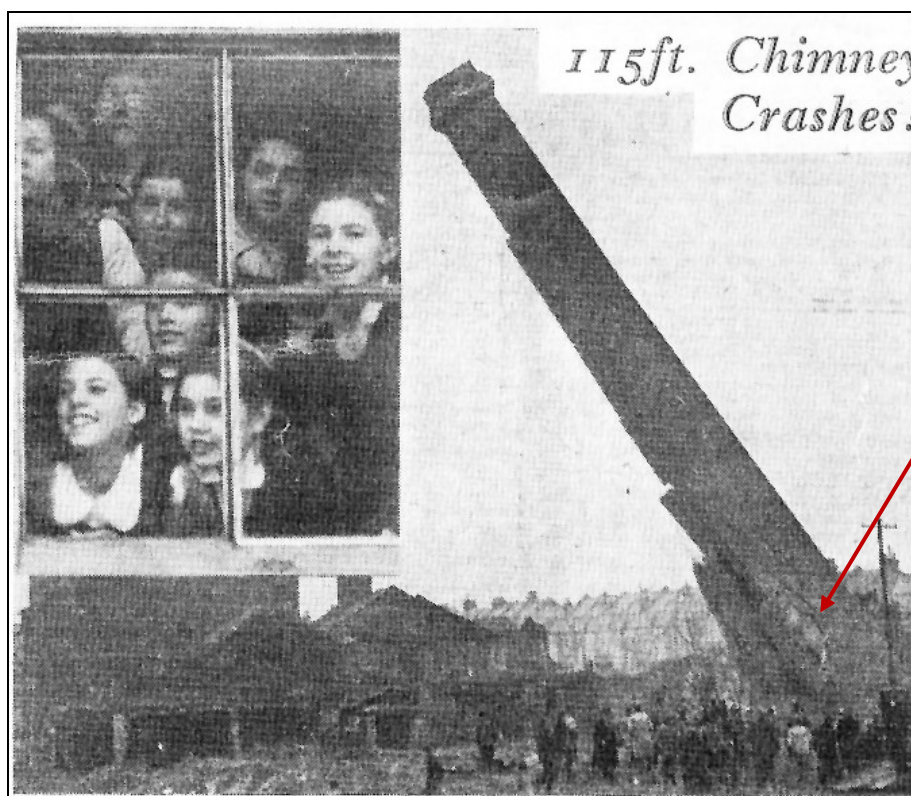
So, bit by bit, the pottery and, in particular, its chimney has become somewhat of a 'friend' that I have come to know and appreciate over the years.

Recently I was shown a post card and at first I couldn't really see the point to it as it was 'just' rooves!



Then I realised *where* it was taken from and *what* it was showing. In the background (to the left) is the Holy Trinity church (later to become the Graham Spicer institute) and just below that there are horses in an open piece of land that later became the dwellings in Howard Road behind the Town Hall. The bird's eye view had been taken, once again, from the top of the chimney stack at the pottery and was again dated 1910.

So what became of the chimney. Well, we know it isn't there now and it isn't something that is dismantled brick by brick so something spectacular planned or otherwise must have happened and of course, it was planned.



Just for the record,
at this angle, my
house is totally
obscured by the
falling chimney!
But you knew that
...didn't you?!

EXCITED GIRLS WATCH DEMOLITION

Thrill for Malden School

TIMBER FIRED TO FELL STACK

Crowding to the windows of the nearby Malden East county secondary girls' school, pupils had an unusual thrill yesterday when they watched a 115 feet high chimney weighing 300 tons, crash to the earth at the nearby premises of Norbiton Potteries and Brickworks.

During the war the brickworks were used for drying processes on wheat and other cereals. Drying kilns were then destroyed in a fire, and consequently the 50 years-old chimney became useless.

For half-an-hour a fire burnt away shoring timber at the base of the chimney, where over three feet of bricks had been cut out. Then smoke poured upwards for the last time to herald the chimney's coming doom.

Signal was given, and the tall pile swayed, seeming to vibrate in the air.

A second later it started to topple forwards.

Four seconds later it was a heap of rubble.

A steeplejack for seven years, 57 years-old Mr. F. J. Bedford and his son, Mr. D. Bedford, spent four-and-a-half days carefully preparing the chimney so that it would fall into a pit and away from houses and other buildings 20 to 30 yards away. People crowded to windows to watch the crash. To avoid any possibility of danger the demolition was delayed for several days owing to high winds.

Before witnessing the crash, girls at the Malden East school had an unusual lesson from the Headmistress (Miss W. A. Bray). She gave them a detailed description of the process involved.

Reading the newspaper report that accompanied the photo it is clear that there is a tad of 'reporter's license' being practiced.

Accompanying this scrapbook cutting and picture was a simple, sheet of paper with handwriting that tells who the people at the window are but, more significantly, it tells of 'where' they were and it is apparently not girls at the windows of the local school but at the Royal Oak!

Alec Mary (Birds)	
Stan	Under Bed.
Flo's Son	W
Joyce	Robertson
Olive	Elizabeth
Sue	
(Mary, Robertson, Joyce (higher family))	
Olive Elizabeth & Sue - (Knicks)	
Photo's taken at "Royal Oak"	
Elizabeth	
Bobby	
Olive	
In contact at Royal Oak	
W	

So, there we have it.... views from and then the end of a chimney! Well, it's not quite the end.

You will recall that I have shown you three pictures taken from the top of the chimney, the cricket field and pottery lake, Blagdon Road (with the gap in the housing) and finally a bird's eye view of New Malden and roof tops. Thanks to the magic of the modern digital world we can reunite these photos (possibly for the first time since 1910) and can show the view that you would have seen from the chimney top.



Ok, so you can see the joins and the perspective of the overlaps is not great, as the cameraman has had to move his tripod around. However I think (hope) that you will agree that it does convey *some* of height and the feeling of open space of 1910 Blagdon Road as viewed from the chimney.