



The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society

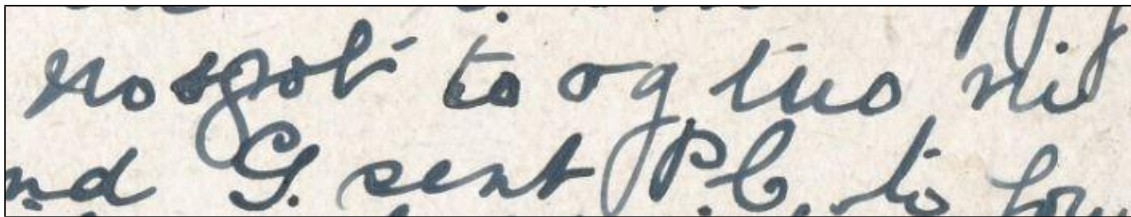
(Founded 2012)

THE LOVERS' SEAT

Julian McCarthy

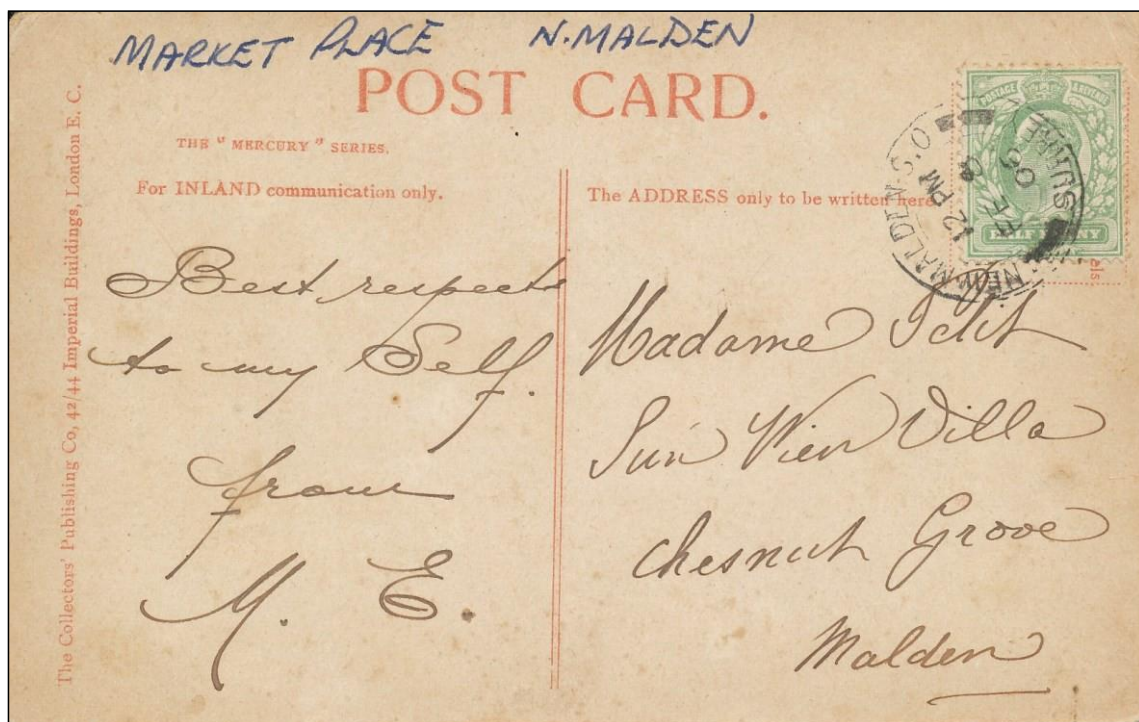
The sentiments written on the reverse of a post card can be a number of things ranging from the hackneyed 'weather fine- wish you were here' and 'X marks our house, hotel, tent, caravan, etc.' to the intriguing and worthy of being sent the Bletchley Park.

Consider, for example:



It reads as: "no sgot to og tuo nit" and, in context, is given as a reason for stopping in! Confused? Well, consider some of it being normal writing i.e. the words no and to, but the rest of the phrase being 'reverse' (as opposed to 'mirror') writing.

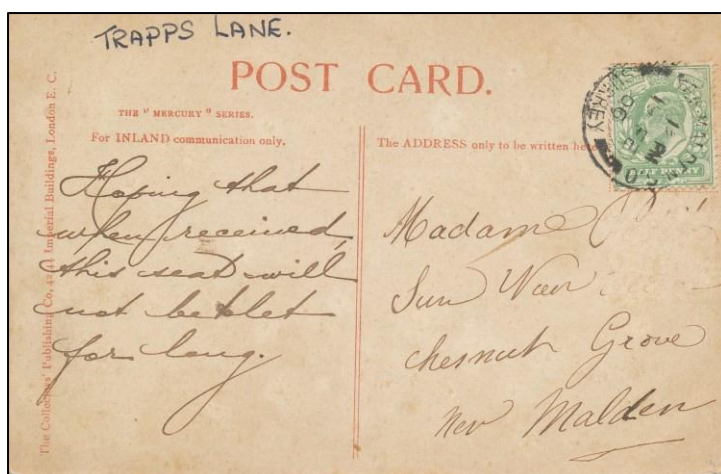
In Edwardian England, and continuing into the reign of George V, people took to collecting post cards. Sometimes themed, sometimes local, mothers would send to daughters, aunts to nephews and on occasion, people would send cards to themselves, not unlike the principle of collecting 'first day covers' for each new stamp issue. I happened to see such a card and the sentiment written on the rear evoked a number of emotions: curiosity, sadness, hope!



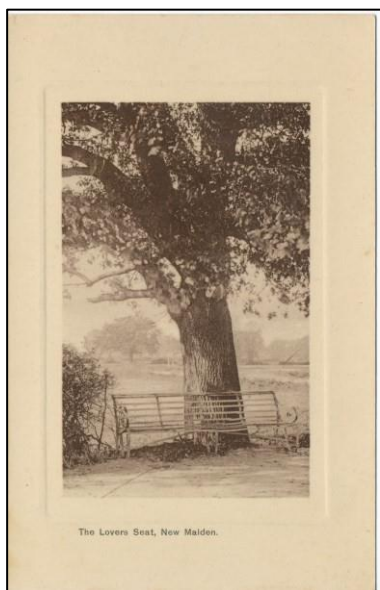
"Best respects to my Self", from M.E. (Petit) who lived in Chestnut Grove and posted the card in February 1906. Why not just send the card home with no sentiment? But then, why *send* the card at all? Madame Petit could simply have taken the card home with her and placed it in an album. When you ask that question and then think about it, there is a little more behind the sentiment than just wishing one's self – the best!

In the same batch of cards that I copied, which seemed to come from Madame's Petit's collection, I found a further intriguing card sent a week or so later.

Compare the handwriting of the two cards, as addressed. They are written in the same hand, the letters being quite distinctive. But then, the sentiment written is in a different hand which leads to a further question of 'why would there be two separate hands of writing on the one card?'



This card and the picture of a simple tree, with a bench in front, have led me a merry dance since I first saw them. Where was the tree? Is the tree still there? What was the sign in the background? Who wrote to her? What, if anything, was the outcome?



The first two of these questions have proven more difficult than expected. I looked for the bench and the tree in photos and on postcards. I have walked up and down Traps Lane looking at each and every tree.

I know that to the west of the lane there were playing fields and to the north of the playing fields was the Coombe Estate and the southern border of the grounds of Coombe House.

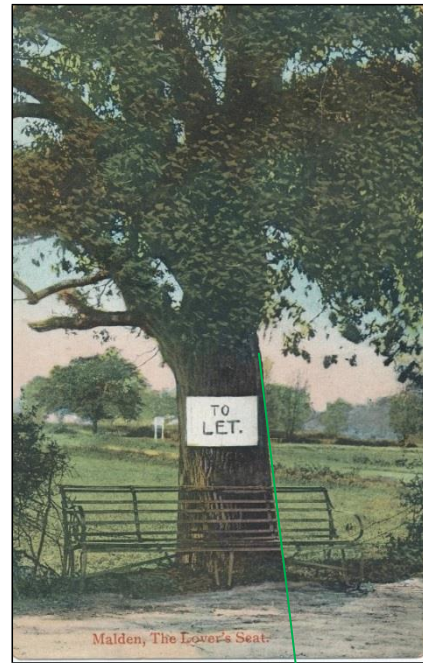
Looking at the coloured, picture above, there are two horizontal borders forming what appears to be a track heading west.



A Track?

I was therefore looking for a tree, leaning (I thought from looking at the picture), slightly to the left with perhaps a track or future road to the right and I found one, just beyond the Royal Oak pub.

It *seemed* to have the same slope and the trunk seemed to then fork in the same directions and at the same point and I knew that there would have been fields in the distance beyond. The track on the card 'could' have been the adjacent road, Woodside Road



I tried to discern the species of the tree on the postcard but to no avail. The more I looked at it the more I was unhappy with the size now and what it 'should' have been. This could be any old tree I thought and I returned to old photos to see if anything could help. I knew that photos of Traps Lane are very few and most focus on the Royal Oak or, further up, solely on the Golf club side.

The easiest solution was to look at old photos of the Royal Oak to see if there was any seat to be seen.



Well, there is a tree beyond the flag and the sign....but no bench. Perhaps this picture was too early?

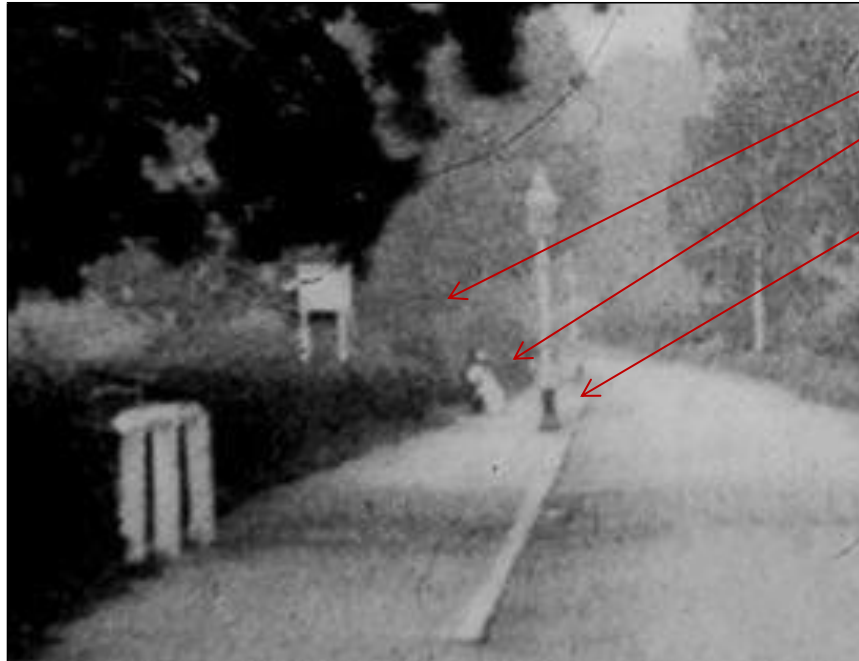


Once again trees but no bench.....I looked closer and further up the road.....



"Hang on" I thought (as opposed to you hanging on) "what are those two white lines? I have seen them before in a photo of Traps Lane. They are where Coombe Brook crosses the Lane. Perhaps I DO have something further up the road!" And when I looked at the picture there was someone sitting down, further up the road and she appeared to have a tree behind her.

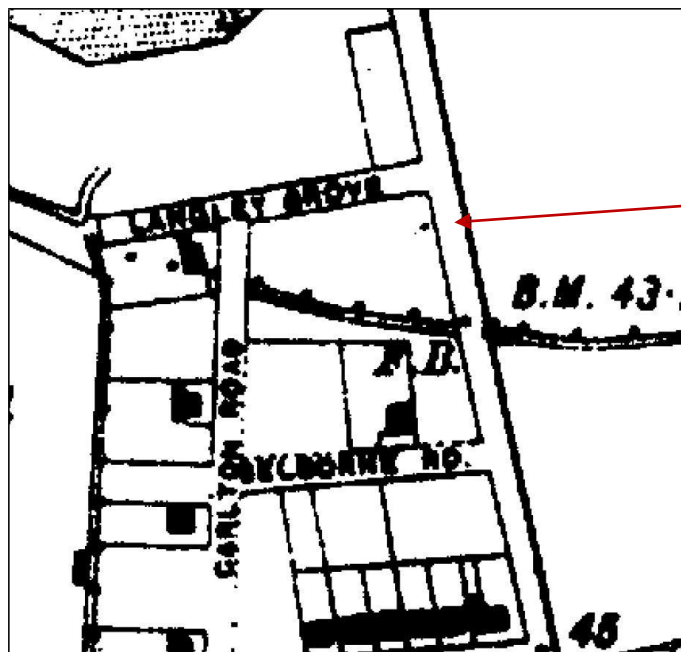




Tree
Bench

Note:
No road
junction
between
the two
lamp posts

Ok, this looks promising, I wonder if there is anything on old maps, just past the Brook? Sure enough, there IS!! It may appear an innocuous dot on the 1920s map but, for me, it is the location of the Lover's Seat!



A single tree just up
from the Brook.

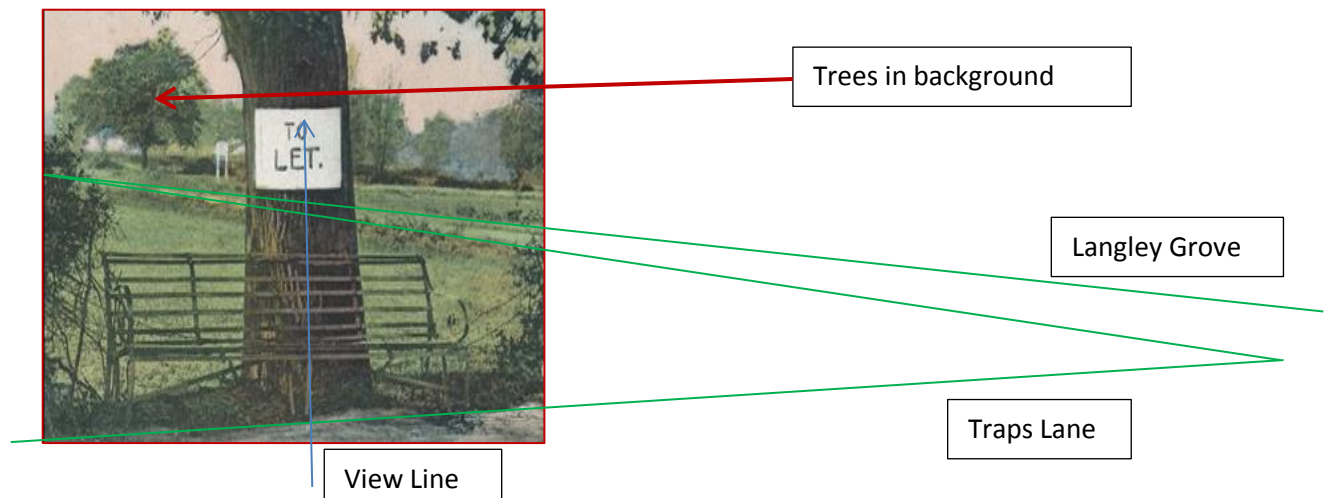
Do you remember I said earlier that I thought that the two hedges in the picture lined a track? I believe these are the boundaries hedges each side of Langley Grove which (referring to the map) would cut at an angle behind the tree. The sign then could (perhaps) have been advertising the next flower show held in the fields just north of this point..



Langley Grove

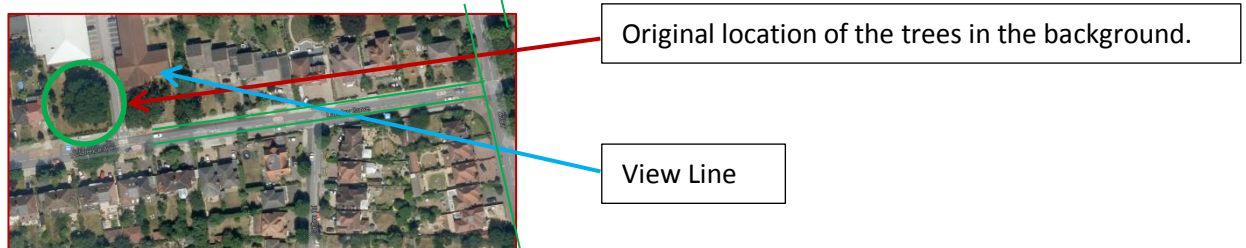
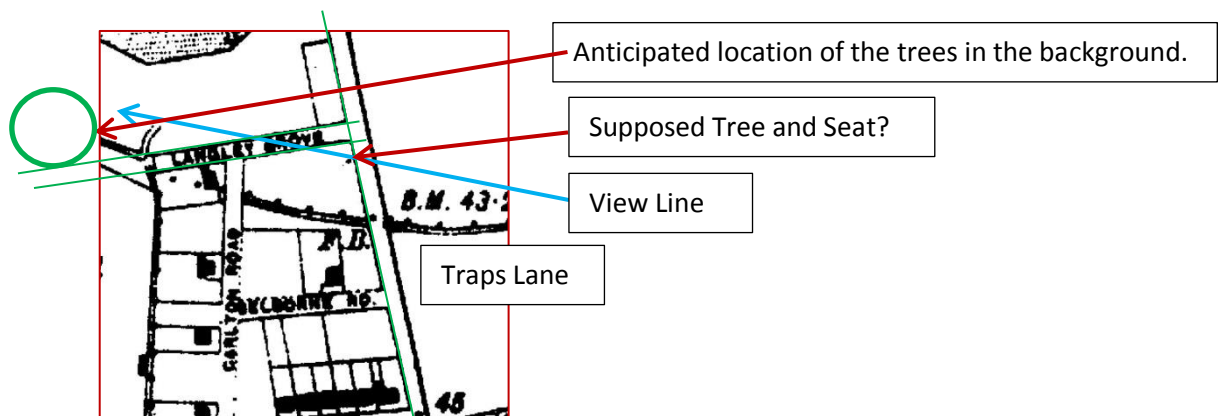
So the tree has totally gone!

When investigating and searching for clues as to a location it is always beneficial to have something to corroborate one's conjecture. I returned to the original card and was drawn to the trees in the background.

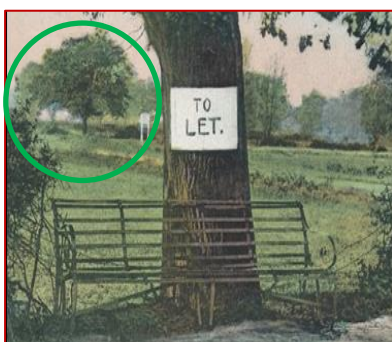


I wondered whether or not the trees in the background might still exist despite the loss of the seat and the tree.

Returning to the map and assuming a view line as the red arrow, based on the proximity to the corner of the road, it is evident that, if the tree exist, they should be to the left of the view line on plan.



Sure enough, as is evident from the plan there ARE indeed well established 'old' trees exactly where one would expect them to be.



Having finished this article I was left with a nagging sense of a loose end. Everything was in place for the location of the tree and hence the seat, but the only image I had was from the post card, looking directly 'at the tree' or the view along Traps Lane where the tree is, to say the least, somewhat blurred- although the positioning of a seat is confirmed by the person sitting down.

Then I received this image:



The Brook

Distinct absence
of a tree or bench!

Langley Grove

So, all I can surmise is that, at some date after the construction of Langley Grove, the tree was removed and lovers had to find somewhere else to sit!