



# The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society

(Founded 2012)

## THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL

Julian McCarthy

In my last article I referred to the terms “Rollocks” and “Bulwarks” to explain my frustration at past photographer’s successes in not taking photos of my house.

Having been brought up ‘not to swear’, by parents who ‘just didn’t’ but then finding, as I progressed through life, that the words exist and there are some occasions where nothing else suffices to convey a sentiment (truly!), I found myself wondering, as I looked at the words, whether or not even in a mollified version the words used are offensive or could be construed as being objectionable.

“Of course not!”, I hear you say, “we have heard much worse!” but that led me, as things usually do, to check if there is a way of judging the ‘*degree of offence*’ caused by the toned-down profanity I had alluded to.

I recalled having seen a comparison between words deemed unacceptable to the BBC in the mid 1970s and in the 1990s and I thought I would check whether or not this information is available to check. (Don’t worry, I am not about to publish a ‘top 10!’). I was astonished to find that apparently, even in this day and age and apparent freedom of information, the BBC will not make the document freely available as they do not consider that it is covered by the Freedom of Information Act.

However, I did manage to find a copy of the 28 most offensive words and was astonished to find that the word I had alluded to was considered the 8<sup>th</sup> most offensive word in 2000. 8<sup>th</sup>? EIGHTH?! (Crikey! .....(not listed). I *may well* have offended someone!

The Pandora’s Box having been opened, I had to see what the BBC in 2000 considered was worse than my allusion. Like a child in a toy shop I scrolled down the list and found words that I personally consider objectionable and would never use. For example, Alf Garnet’s preferred profanity (this being the prefix to both Henry V111’s daughter “.....Mary” and to one of the towers at the Tower of London) comes in at number 27!

So I believe I should apologise to anyone I may have offended. It is not a sexist comment but, considering the nature of historical investigations, there was a time when such words would have to be kept from ‘Ladies’ ears’ as they were ‘Sugar and Spice’ whereas boys were, apparently, ‘Snips, snails and puppy dogs’ tails!

Well, I have to advise you that, in a quiet part of 1938 New Malden, women were bucking this trend. Reading through the annual reports of the Borough Sanitary and Health inspector I came across this paragraph in the annual report of 1938.

A few years ago the partition walls of the men’s conveniences in Dukes Avenue were reconstructed and faced with glazed tiles to prevent them being defaced with objectionable writing. During the year I was forced to ask for the ladies’ compartments to be dealt with in a similar manner and this was done.

Note the polite, but patently clear wording... “I was forced to ask” and “dealt with”. So, 1938 ladies of New Malden, it seems to have been a little less of the ‘...all things nice’ and a little more than a hint of “snips and snails”. Ladies, what were you writing on the walls?

Of course, this piece isn’t about the writing but about ‘where these walls that had to be *dealt with*’ were.

We know that the public toilets were in Dukes Avenue but an “in convenience” truth is that photographs do not seem to depict the local civil relief centre. Ok so not a direct photo with the toilets being the subject – why would they? – but I would have hoped to have caught an image by chance. There *are* clues, but they only confirm what we know and that is they were in Dukes Avenue.

For instance, this photo taken in 1959 at the corner of Grafton Road has a sign, undoubtedly advising that there were toilets in the vicinity and we can speculate that the sign pointed in the direction of Dukes Avenue.



An earlier sign provided a pointing finger.....



PUBLIC CONVENIENCE



So where were the toilets?

Looking at the picture below it is clear that beyond the bank there was open land and we know also that, shortly thereafter there is the parade of buildings with the corner shop and prior to that used to be Bebe's salon.



Looking at a similar view today...



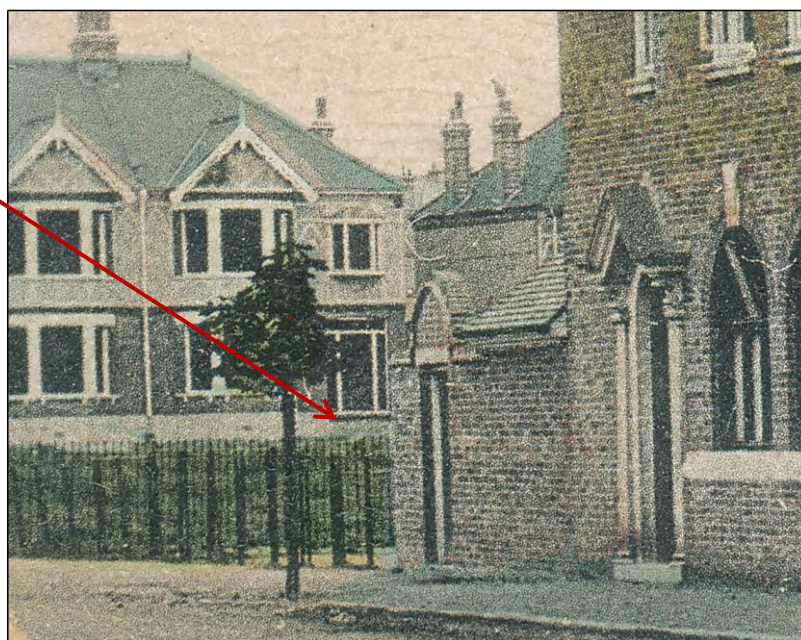
...I believe the toilets were in the small, single storey outhouse at the back of the bank buildings. This has been confirmed by a couple of residents who have advised....

"The ladies & gents toilets stood right where the entrance to the car park behind Waitrose is now, it was a brick building with the gents entrance one end and the ladies at the other end."

**The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society, 135C South Lane, New Malden. KT3 5HQ**  
**Telephone: 020 8949 3157 Email: maldensandcoombehs@gmail.com**



Toilets??



It appears that they may even had a tree so that the owner's dogs could be tied to the tree and use their own convenience.



Today there is nothing for the pedestrian, 'taken short', just an extension and Waitrose store. However, our canine friends can still use the bus stop that has replaced the tree!

To conclude and perhaps undo any reparation to my character I have made since alluding to the 8<sup>th</sup> ranked profanity, I thought you may be mildly amused by a piece of graffiti seen in a construction site in New Malden.

At eye level, directly in front of a urinal someone had drawn what appeared to be a hatched band or a net, above which was the instruction "LOOK TO YOUR LEFT!". Not having much else to occupy my attention, I duly obliged and there, on the left hand wall again at eye level, was another instruction. "NOW LOOK TO YOUR RIGHT!!". Of course I did so and there, on the right hand wall was a sign saying.....

"YOU ARE NOW PLAYING URINAL TENNIS!"