



The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society

(Founded 2012)

WATT IS ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

Julian McCarthy

One school of thought has it that, as people get older and wiser they become more cynical and hence crankier, grumpier and they let small, apparently insignificant things to the 'outside' world bother them, whereas another has it that being older and wiser leads to a relaxed and calm mind where one takes life for what it is and nothing is ever really an issue.

I personally do not subscribe to the view that things being bothersome by which I mean irritating, frustrating or annoying is age-related. Victor and Margaret Meldrew (from *One Foot in the Grave*) were both in their autumnal years but (thanks to a very clever script) it was always clear that Margaret viewed the autumn as crisp, fresh, tinted golden with a hint of reddish brown, Victor just saw the leaves on his lawn! No, it isn't age-related at all.

By the way. 'One Foot in the Grave' as an idiom apparently dates back (in print) to the 1632 play *The Fatal (sic) Dowry* (by Massinger and Field) wherein there is reference to "When one foot's in the grave". Interestingly the meaning then and now are different. Whereas the phrase is now suggestive of 'old age' or approaching the 'midnight' of one's 'day on the earth', back then it meant actually 'trapped by death' with no possible escape as in 'trapped by the foot in the grave'.

Whether we like it or not we are all knowingly irritated by small things. An itch that you cannot reach to scratch is a typical example, as are grit in one's shoe, an eyelash in the eye or a fly on a piece of cake or live caterpillar in a salad.

Then there are the people (and I am a prime example) who like, want or, perhaps, even 'need' closure. Puzzles do it for me every time. They *'have'* to be solved. You may never have really thought about it and, truthfully, I hadn't until writing that last line ...they 'have' to be solved! Puzzles, riddles, call them what you will, they are like living entities obtaining the status of mental parasites or a thought virus.

Some of us are naturally immune but others succumb and are troubled by that little thought inside our head, be it that last crossword clue, or Sudoku numbers, that last word in the word search table or even the name of a tune or an actor that they cannot recall. It is an itch in the middle of one's back, a stone in one's shoe and an eyelash in the eye all at the same time!

I can recall lying in bed 40 years ago and hearing on the radio, one Sunday Night / Monday morning, the following puzzle:

"A man comes into town at 10pm on Saturday. He stays in town for five hours but still leaves on Saturday!"

So, the presenter assured me (and I suppose anyone else listening) that he would give the answer at 2.00am and so he may well have done. However, at 2.00pm I was sound asleep and never heard the answer. I asked time and again but to no avail and this being pre-internet I couldn't search for the answer. It stayed with me, unanswered and lodged in my consciousness like the bullet in Chief Inspector Ironside's back. You may not really understand how frustrating this was but it was an itch that erupted, every once in a while and I felt I was destined never to have the answer. But then, about five years ago, I heard the question repeated and the answer!! The itch was finally scratched, the pebble removed from the shoe and the eyelash cried out.

Years had come and gone, I was now a father and whilst I had matured that one question had bugged me!

Why, dear reader, do I tell you this? Well approximately 10 years after that question, Stephen H. Day the author, published his book *Malden ~ Old and New* and unknowingly burdened me ('infected' me is perhaps somewhat unfair) with three further puzzles that required closure. On page 38 he writes the simple caption:

“The group of officers (below) has been photographed against the backdrop of some houses which could give a clue to that location”

Evidently, the actual location was a mystery and a mystery is a puzzle and a puzzle HAS to be solved!

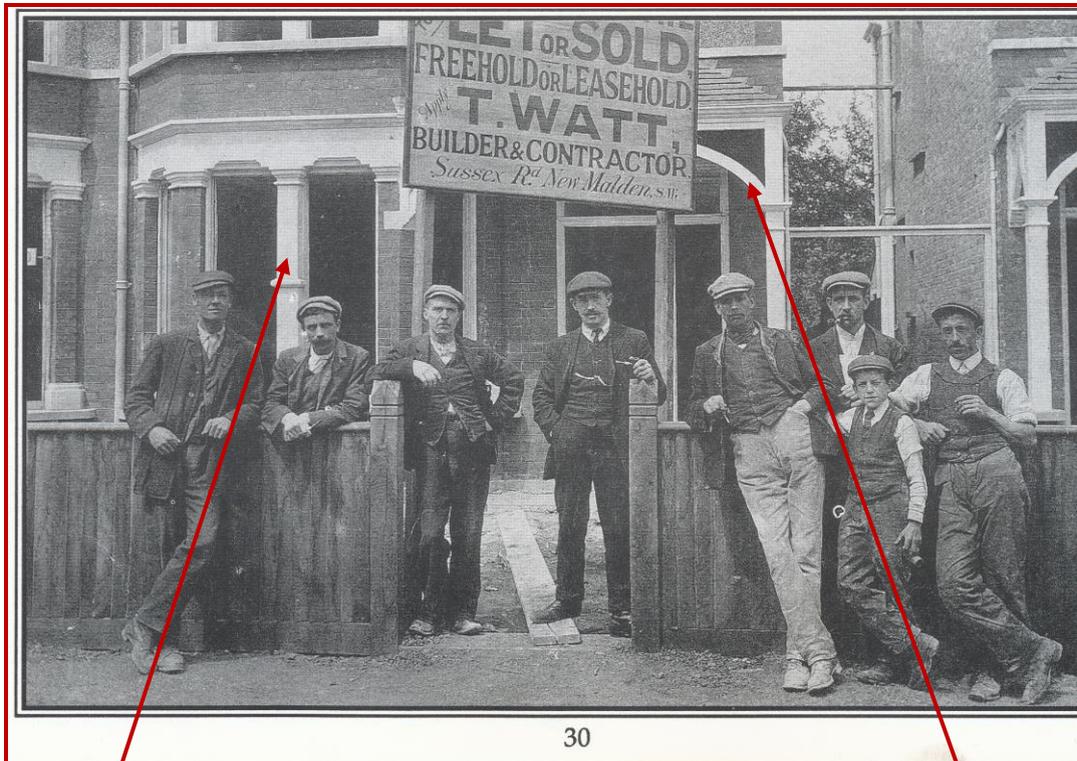


Naturally this caught my attention. Where, where could this have been? It was the rear of a property but, once again, it was not at all possible, at that time, to access the internet to view home 'from above'. Imagine, then my surprise when I realised that one of the houses behind the officers was in fact my parents' house and that even my old bedroom window in the roof was being shown. I contacted the author to let him know and that one of the three mystery locations had been solved but this still left two more locations in New Malden that I had to find. I refer of course to the two other 'mysteries' that Stephen Day had left on page 30.

Hopefully, you will have read the article 'Where was the annual flower show held?' I found that the house that is in the picture is still there at the end of Langley Grove and, by reference to pictures and post cards, we can see where the shows were.

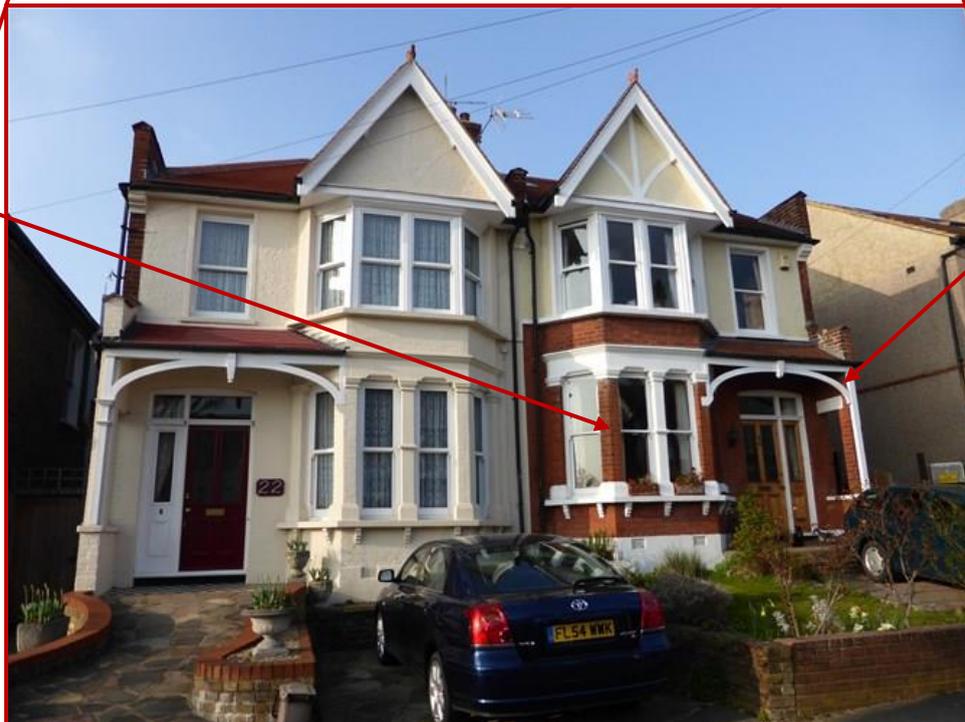


However, despite my resolving one of the mysteries by chance and the next by reference to old photos I knew of no other way to solve the last mystery location shown at the bottom of page 30 than to drive up and down roads looking to see if I could find the location. Now you must remember that this has been in my head ever since I read the book back in 1990. I have regularly looked at this tantalising photo of the builders who are ever there looking out at me, daring me to find out where they had been standing.



What is there to go on? The timber fence is unlikely to have remained, there are no house numbers and the doors and windows are not yet installed. I therefore looked at the timber detail of the front porch and also the bay window with brick pillars and a central detail. By the magic and wonders of Google and 'Street View' I have recently been driving up and down roads of New Malden searching and I thought, I had found the answer in Malden Hill. Compare the timber details and the bay windows.

Same window details

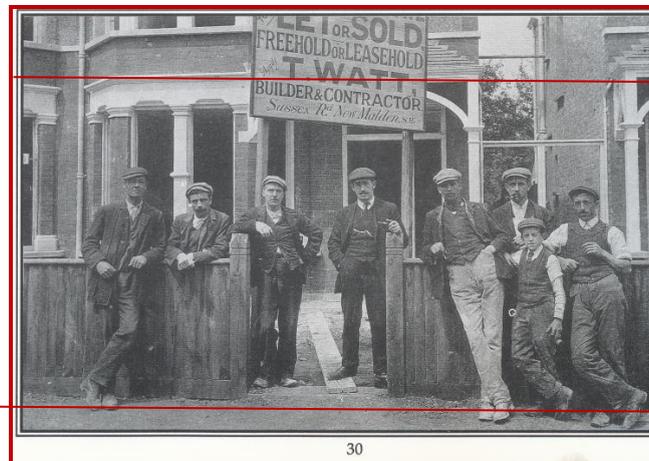


Same timber details

There is a well-worn phrase which is “It is not over until it is over!” and the fact that I had found the windows and porch details was not enough. I looked again at the old picture and could almost hear the builders saying, “You think it’s that easy, do you? Well, look again, because we are still here and you haven’t found us!”



What did they mean? Then it became clear, they were not standing on a hill! The houses were level. I looked at the images for the small group of houses in Malden Hill and they are staggered with the hill so whilst they have the same visual attributes, the builders were right, I hadn’t found them!



Level

Level

I jumped back into my 'virtual' Google car and set off around the streets of New Malden. I knew these were older houses from both the architectural style and also the workmen's' clothing. So any houses built in the 30's were out. It seemed sensible to start around Malden Hill but despite 'driving' up and down Coombe Gardens, Dukes Avenue, Park View and all around the area but here was not a house to match, let alone two similar properties on the 'level.

OK so an older building. I'll head back to the Groves, down Acacia, right onto Poplar and right again into Chestnut Grove and there they were. I had driven past them twice but clearly these were the houses, they had the same details and were all on the same level.

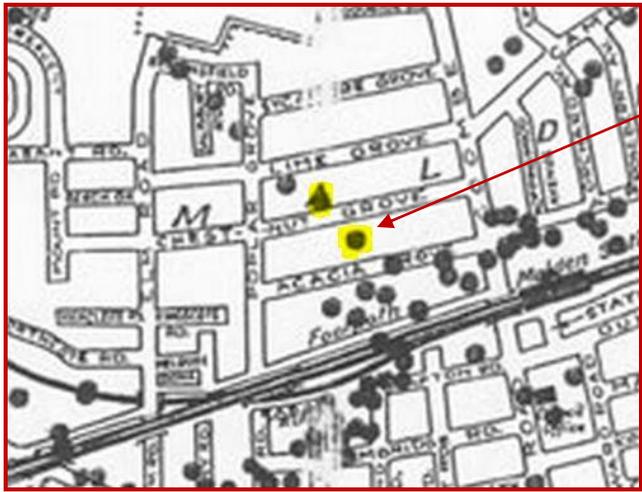


I looked at the houses either side of the semi-detached pair. On the right, to the east is an older building and as in the old image there is a building to the right, then I knew it couldn't have been outside the door of the right hand semi. It must therefore have been the left of the pair.



One final thing bothered me and that was the age of the buildings to the west of the semis, which appeared newly constructed and the building opposite, this being Chestnut Court. Could, perhaps, a bomb have landed and demolished houses alongside or opposite such that I had the wrong house?

I have checked the 'Tim Everson' map of Bombing of New Malden and (hopefully) neither Tim nor the museum/local history room will mind if a small extract is reproduced to show bombing in Chestnut Grove.

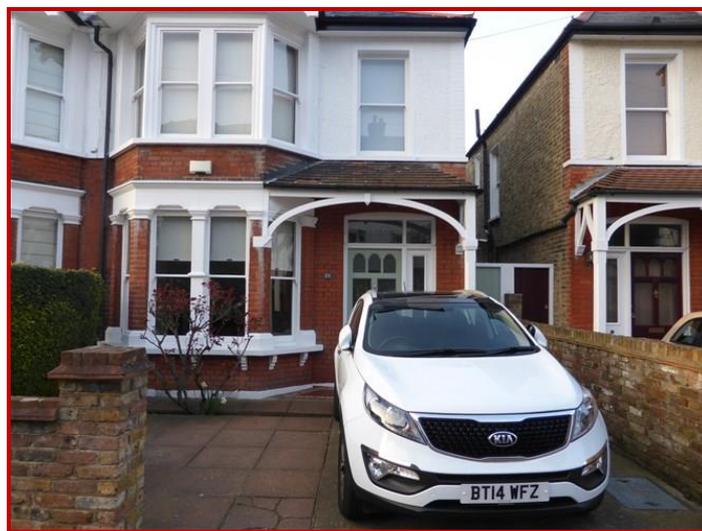


Bombs

Location of house – away from bombs



It is clear that although there were two bombs in Chestnut Grove, neither of these are likely to have demolished houses of a similar construction in the road. I therefore believe I now have the house where the photo was taken.



So – all puzzles now solved and all itches have been scratched!

(Oh yes, I nearly forgot! Just in case there are those of you who want the answer to the man who arrived on Saturday and stayed for five hours puzzle, which bugged me for all those years, I have hidden the answer for you in this piece. Puzzlers among you may have seen it but if not, then please go back to the puzzle and take the first letter of each of the next 28 lines immediately after the italicised puzzle – starting with 'So'- we get: **Saturday** etc!)