

A School For Naughty Boys

The North London Truant School

In 1884, Northcott House at 115, High Street, Walthamstow was the *North London Truant* School (Which later became an 'Industrial' school) It was certified for the education of 85 residential children and in 1894, it was extended and re-certified for the same purpose for 120 children. In 1934, the number of children allowed to be accommodated at the school was reduced to 85. This was in response to the provisions of the 1933 Children & Young Persons Act. This was an Act of Parliament that, among other things, laid down the conditions of how children were to be accommodated.

A Large Georgian House

Norhcott's was formerly a large Georgian private house which had been modified to be used as a Truant school. According to David Mander (The author of '*Walthamstow Past*') The original '*Northcotts*' was a substantial house situated on a site that was later occupied by Walworth's. It was built before 1744, rebuilt in 1761 and demolished in 1965.

Industrial Schools

Certified industrial schools were promoted as an alternative to reformatories. After an unsuccessful campaign to remove the prison requirement for those entering reformatories, the Industrial School was put forward as a similar institution but aimed at a younger age group and without the prison element. Industrial schools had two main objects, to instil in the children the habit of working and to develop the latent potential of the destitute child

What Was Their Purpose?

Industrial Schools were intended to help those children who were destitute but who had not as yet committed any serious crime. The children needed to be removed from the environment and bad influences, in which they had been living, give them an education and teach them a trade. The vocational training is why they were called an industrial school. A range of skills were taught which varied from school to school. These included carpentry, boot repairing and tailoring. (It sounded good but it was not always as good as it sounded - In the St John's RC Industrial School in Shernhall Street, the skills taught included wood chopping and knitting!)

Qualification For Entry To An Industrial School

Initially, under the Industrial Schools Act of 1857, children aged seven to fifteen who were convicted of vagrancy could be placed in an Industrial School. A further Act in 1861 defined four categories of potential entrants: under-fourteens found begging; under-fourteens found wandering and homeless or frequenting with thieves; under-twelves who had committed and imprisonable offence; under-fourteens who parents could not control them.

In 1876, the Elementary Education Act authorized School Boards to establish Industrial Schools and Day Industrial Feeding Schools "*for those children whose education is neglected by their parents, or who are found wandering or in bad company*". From 1880, any child under 14 found to be living in a brothel, or living with or associating with common or reputed prostitutes, could be sent to an Industrial School. A further Act in 1893 raised the age of admission to Reformatories to 12, and the obligatory age of release was reduced from 21 to 19.

Walthamstow's Industrial Schools



Above: Northcott House in 1964 on the corner of High St & Palmerstone Road.

Walthamstow had two Industrial schools for boys. One was the *St John's Roman Catholic Industrial School For Boys* in Shernhall Street on the site where the present day Holy Family

Catholic School & Sixth Form now stands. This was a school only for boys whose families were Roman Catholics.

Walthamstow's other Industrial school was the *North London Truant School*. Despite the fact that it was situated in Walthamstow, this school had nothing to do with Walthamstow and was was jointly managed by the Tottenham, Hornsey and Edmonton School Boards. It was used to educate children who had been convicted of minor offences and for those who were considered to be beyond the control of their parents or guardians. In later times most such schools became 'approved' schools.

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A Parliamentary Question

We learn from *Hansard* (The government newspaper) that, on the 2nd April 1936, Reg Sorenson, the Leyton Labour Party MP, asked a question concerning '*Northcotts*' in Parliament. The answer to his question gives us good information about the school.

He asked the Home Secretary "How many boys there are at present in the Northcotts school in , Walthamstow, and the number for which it is certified; what is the area covered by the buildings and playground, respectively; is he satisfied that this space offers adequate facilities for recreation, games, and physical exercise; whether he is aware that the dining hall is heated only by an oil stove; and what plans are being made for replacing the existing buildings and playgrounds by more adequate premises for the education of children committed to the school for several years' training?"

In reply he was told "This school is certified for 85 boys but at the present time of pressure the Managers of Approved Schools are authorised to receive one or two more boys if they are satisfied that they can accommodate them, and the number of boys in this school on Monday last was 89. The area covered by the buildings is 2,780 square yards and by the grounds 5,286 square yards. The school is an old one and has fewer facilities for games than the modern school. It has an asphalted playground of 519 square yards, 1,765 square yards of garden used for games, 900 square yards used for garden plots, and facilities for obtaining pitches in playing fields in the district. In addition to this the Managers are converting a further 2,000 square yards of the garden for use for games. The dining hall is heated by two coal fires and hot water pipes. It is anticipated that the school will be closed during the course of next year when it will be replaced by a modern school which the Middlesex County Council are in process of providing"

School Closure

In 1941, during the war, the school in the High Street was closed and the school transferred to Pishiobury at Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire. The High Street site came under the control of Walthamstow Council and it was used as a Heavy Rescue Service centre for equipment and men who dealt with the day to day effects of WWII bombing. After the war it was used by the Council for various purposes that included being a distribution centre for free babies milk and orange juice in the 1950's . At the end of August 1954, it became a permanent Council Central Store. And was demolished in 1965.

Job Henry Charles Drain

Two 'Naughty' Boys

On November 28th 1914 Charles E N Russell of the Home Office wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Swansea Education. In this letter he referred to the heroism of Lance Corporal Fuller of the 2nd Battallion Welsh Regiment and Driver Drain of the 57th Battery of the RFA who had both been awarded Victoria Crosses.

He pointed out that Fuller was an ex pupil of the Swansea Truant School and Drain was an ex pupil of the Walthamstow (North London) Truant School.



In relation to Driver Drain he said: "*Driver Drain of the 37tn Battery R.F.A. Whose conduct in early life led to him being sent to the Walthamstow Truant School. His boyish faults have however been blotted out by the help he gave in saving the guns under heavy fire at Le Cateau on August the 26th....*"

A Mystery

The big puzzle that I am unable to solve is why he was placed in Wathamstow's North London Truant school? Essentially, the school was for children from the Tottenham, Hornsey and Edmonton School Boards. However, most of these institutions had 'tit for tat' arrangements with other similar institutions and he may have been placed under such an arrangement.

Job Henry Charles Drain

Childhood



Driver Drain was Job Henry Charles Drain who was born in Barking in 1895. He was the son of Job and Susan Drain neé Stokes and had a younger brother Albert. His mother died when he was only 5 years old in 1900 and his brother died age 4 years old in 1902.

In the 1911 Census, his father is shown as 'married' for 17 years to Emily Drain and there are a number of other children vis: May, age 17; Charles, age 12; John, age 6; Frederick, age 4 and Peter age 1 year. His father married Emily L Anderson in 1916 and these children must be Emily's from a previous relationship.

In this situation, having lost his mother and brother at a young age and having to share his father with another woman and competing with 5 step-siblings; it is not very surprising that young Job Drain would have been a

'troubled' young lad with a record of truancy. His teacher at Brick Lane Boys School in Barking said that he was one of the worst boys in the school and his parents said that he hated school. It was against this background, in 1912, when he was 17 years old he volunteered for the regular army.

Army Service

He was 18 years old, and a Driver in the 37th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, British Army during the First World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.

The British Expeditionary Force (BEF), a small force of tough well-trained professional soldiers, first saw action at Mons in Belgium in mid-August 1914. The British force of seventy thousand men and three hundred guns faced a far superior German force comprising a hundred and sixty thousand troops with six hundred guns. Forced to retreat under overwhelming odds, the BEF fell back, inflicting serious casualties on the Germans on the way. Numerous acts of heroism were performed by British troops during this period, one such incident occurred on the 26th August 1914.

Save The Guns!



Captain Reynolds RFA with Drivers Drain and Luke recovering one of the howitzers of 37th Battery .

On 26 August 1914 at Le Cateau, France, the artillerymen of 37th Battery, Royal Field Artillery at Le Cateau, strove to limber up their horse drawn guns in a hail of fire from enemy infantry, who were within 200 yards of the muzzles. Four of the six 37th Battery RFA's 4.5 inch howitzers were got away, but to recover the remaining two seemed suicidal to be a suicidal task.

Nevertheless, when Captain Douglas Reynolds asked for volunteers to try to recapture two guns, there was no shortage of men willing to take on the risk. Driver Drain and another driver (Frederick Luke) volunteered to help and gave great assistance in the eventual saving of one of the guns. At the time they were under heavy artillery and infantry fire from the enemy who were only 100 yards

Below: King George V with the Prince of Wales in France 1916



Two teams galloped forward to what seemed like certain death. One was quickly shot down, but the other got to the gun position, wheeled round, limbered-up and brought one of the howitzers out of action, one of the drivers being hit in the process. For their actions Captain Douglas Reynolds and Drivers Frederick Luke and Job Drain all received the Victoria Cross.

Job Drain was invested with his Victoria Cross by King George V in the field at Locon, France on the 1st December 1914.

Douglas Reynolds, promoted to major, was killed in action on the Western Front on 23rd February 1916. Frederick Luke and Job Drain both became sergeants and survived the war.

When The War Was Over

Below: a LGOC bus c1920



After the war was over, Job Drain found it hard to adjust to civilian life. He married Patricia Murray on Xmas day 1920 at Poplar. He had a variety of jobs; working as a messenger for government offices in Whitehall, then as a fish porter, a local bus driver and finally for the London Electricity Board.

As a bus driver he had several brushes with the law. In 1926 he was working as a bus driver for London General Omnibus Company and was summoned for obstructing a tramcar at Plaistow.

His defence was that he could not get his bus off the tramway track because cyclists were in the way! The case was dismissed with costs against West Ham Corporation

.In 1935, he was working as a bus driver and summoned for failing to obey a traffic signal in Oxford Street. His lawyer told the magistrate that his client held a VC. The magistrate said "I have never fined a VC yet. Pay 5s costs"

He passed away at his home in Barking, aged 79, on 26th July 1975, and was buried at Rippleside cemetery. Six years later his wife Patricia Cecilia Drain was buried in the same grave.

In 2009 Barking Council commissioned a statue of Job Drain. At a prestigious ceremony held on Tuesday, 10th November 2009, the two grandsons of Job Drain unveiled the statue to commemorate their grandfather which is located in front of the Broadway Theatre facing Barking Abbey Park. On the reverse of the statue base is a plaque depicting Job Drain's heroic action in saving the guns at Le Cateau, France, on 26th August 1914.

Some Sources:

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Acknowledgements;

To Sally Passmore who inspired me to research and write this piece and for bringing the image of Northcott House to my attention.

Various images from the internet

Addenda

The Essex Weekly News carried the following item early in 1915:-

HOW DRAINE SAVED THE GUNS - PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF GREAT BATTLE

Interviewed by a representative of the Essex Weekly News, Driver Draine related how he went out with his battery and arrived in France on August 19. On August 23 they detrained at Le Cateau. Early on August 24 they went into action near Mons, and afterwards came the great retreat. Pressed to tell how he won the coveted distinction, he was at first unwilling to speak of himself. He then said: -



"We opened fire during the morning of Wednesday August 26th, coming into action on a big plain. There was no cover or hiding place whatever, so we had to get on with it the best way we could. There were 18 pounder batteries on either side of us, and there were hundreds of our Infantry going up to meet the enemy. Siege batteries were in the rear of us.

The Germans soon started shelling, and both sides were firing as hard as they could. It was now getting terrible. Shells came all ways in sixes and tens at the time. They were bursting all over the place - on the tops of our guns, and over our wagon lines, with plenty of spare rifle bullets flying about. Men and horses were getting wounded and killed. We received the order to get mounted. It was terrible. Shells were still bursting over the top of us. Other batteries were getting smashed to pieces. Lumps of shells and bullets were flying down in between us. We could not get anywhere for shelter, so we had to sit on our horses with our heads bent down between

the animals. Most of our drivers got wounded and we had given up all hope of escape, and only waited for our turn at any moment to come. The shells burst like rain. Our Major, who was at the observing station, sent down the order that the 37th Battery would never retire. Our Captain then took control of the Battery. We stayed in action until we had lost nearly half our men, which was about 60 or 70, killed or wounded. The cries of the wounded and the shouting of the men was something terrible. I do not think there was a man on the field that day who did not say his Prayers.

At last a general retirement was ordered. The 18 pounder Battery on the right of us went up to get their guns, but most of them were blown to pieces. Two teams only escaped, and they came down to our Battery, and our Captain claimed them to take two of our guns away. There were now four guns left in action and the question was what was to be done. The Captain sent down for wagon teams and gun limbers, and we made a dash for it. Only two teams reached the guns; they were F and B sub-sections. We managed to get two more guns away safely and took them to the nearest village. Then our Captain said, 'We must have more guns', so F and B turned round and went back at a mad gallop. This time the German Infantry were only 100 yards off our guns. Driver Luke and myself went back at a mad pace, but Driver Cobey, my centre driver, was shot

from his horse. There were then only left myself and Driver Luke, who was also awarded the VC, Captain Reynolds VC, Legion of Honour, who is now a Major in the Artillery, and two or three others. It was the worst time of my life. Shells and bullets were flying like rain from the clouds. This was my VC ride, and it was a ride of either life or death. I do not know how we managed to escape, but we saved two guns.

Later, I and Driver Luke and Captain Reynolds were awarded the VC, and we were decorated on the field by the King at a place called Locon. His Majesty was accompanied by the Prince of Wales at the time."

Bill Bayliss

April 2014