

MY PERSONAL RECORD OF THE WMs GATHERING [Thurs 23-Sun 26 June 2011]

By Pam Ray

I chose to travel up on the Wed 22 June, as I needed to return home on the Sat.

After an early start (via bus, coach & underground rail) I finally reached the Walthamstow Underground station about 3.30pm. As a Snr Cit, with a gippy hip, the prospect of dragging my case up the 2 flights of steps was rather daunting BUT, along came a pleasant young man who carried it up the stairs for me & directed me towards the Taxi Rank. What a wonderful welcome to Walthamstow!

The Taxi Driver was equally as helpful - when I mentioned I'd just arrived from Bristol, he delighted in telling me about his memories during a visit to Bristol. He pulled up right outside the Hotel door & carried my case into reception - another kindly deed that was greatly appreciated.

Even after 40+ years living in Bristol (my husband's job brought us down here) I still miss the London dialect & it was like 'coming home'. It's true about the old saying that "You can take a girl out of London, but you can't take London out of her!" - it's certainly true in my case.

I stayed at the same Hotel as Daniel Quinn, who had arrived a little earlier from his home in Florence, Italy, with his wife & some friends. Daniel was kind enough to invite me to join them at The Rose & Crown pub for an evening meal - by way of 'thanks' to the local folk who had helped 'glue' it altogether. This was a pre-WMs Gathering which gave me an opportunity to meet & see the faces of people like John Knowles, now based in Norwich & The Founder of the WMs Website, some of the many wonderful 'at source' team of volunteers, as well as Daniel Quinn, based in Florence & Co-Editor, his wife & some of his personal friends. Even though I was feeling tired, it was a joy to be part of such a happy gathering.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Thurs 23 June - DAY 1

[Early Morning] As it was such a beautiful day, I chose to walk part of the way + experience the local bus service to get me to the Walthamstow Central Bus Terminus, before joining the others at the Rose & Crown. Whilst there, I sought the help & advice at the Enquiries Office as to the best way to get to Victoria Bus Terminus on Sat. The kindly lady not only gave me a local bus map, the larger area map & directions - she wrote out bus numbers, bus stop names, as well as marking them on the map. [I wish I'd have noted her name!] She then asked if there was a specific reason for me being in Walthamstow & was very supportive when I explained about the WMs Gathering & gave me a few pointers as to what to look out for. Plus, by way of added personal security, she gave me her own keyring (of triple tinkling silver bells) & placed it on the zip of my shoulder bag - to ensure I was immediately made aware should it be mishandled. [Well, past or present, it's essential to be mindful that the world is made of all sorts!!]

After the initial reception & welcome at the Rose & Crown - with hugs & handshakes all round - we were each given a tote bag, with **I Love Walthamstow Memories** printed on it, which was full of lots of useful info & gadgets, pad & pen & our own 'personal' name tag - beautifully engraved by Daniel's fair hand. A good start to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Walthamstow Memories Website, indeed. Some of the folk were local to Walthamstow, others from further afield in Essex, as well as those of us who had travelled from afar. Over a cuppa, John Knowles entertained us with some of his childhood memories of Walthamstow which triggered off some interesting stories from current locals, too. Whilst this was going on "Rhubarb", The Clown [aka Martin Solity of London & does his clowning in various countries], flitted in & out of our private group. I managed to take some photos of him with some of the members - which I'll be passing onto Daniel in due course. At one point, during a conversation about Autism & the like, Rhubarb came 'out of character' - something he wouldn't usually do, it seems - to recount some personal stories about folk he'd met on his travels. It's said that behind each smiley clown face, there's a very sad & often lonely one. This particular clown proved to be a very intelligent & informative one.

The folk at the Rose & Crown were very helpful & worked hard to keep up with it all. It proved to be the 'in-place' to be for locals, due to its atmosphere, hospitality, music - both Management & staff being on hand to make it so.

During lunch at the Rose & Crown we were entertained with goldie-oldie tunes, played on the piano by Chris Hill - for me, the piano triggered off some old memories of when I was a child, in East London. Some families owned a piano (in our case, it was a battered old thing & usually out of tune!) but it was a great source of entertainment - in the days before ordinary folk could afford TVs, etc (the digital stuff hadn't been thought of then, either).

After lunch we were transported to the **Vestry House Museum** for the presentation of the [cheque for £750.00] monies, donated by the WMs Website Family, near & far. It will go a long way towards keeping the local history & archives open & available to all. After refreshments, we enjoyed a very quick tour of the museum + the Research Library/Archives.

Mid-afternoon back at the Rose & Crown we were enlightened by local history talks from very knowledgeable speakers, which was followed by a most enjoyable buffet.

Evening a live musical evening of entertainment [a mixture of old & modern], by WMs members, including John Knowles & Daniel Quinn, but shared with everyone as an open forum. Brilliant!

Fri 24 June - Day 2 (Alas! my last day)

9.30 am - We met up outside the Town Hall [as seen on the Home Page of the Walthamstow Memories website & really does look that good!], ready to make our way to the Council Chamber, to meet the Mayor of Waltham Forest Council. Wow! We were invited to sit in the front row 'hot seats' & all at a comfortable distance to be able to see & hear each others conversation with the Mayor & were presented to the Mayor, Councillor Geoffrey Walker - a most genteel Gent.

John Knowles explained why & how the WMs website was originally formed by himself & how it has been developed into its current form by Daniel. John then read out & presented to The Mayor, the **Walthamstow Memories (parchment) Scroll** - beautifully prepared in calligraphy writing by Daniel (one of his many artistic talents).

The Mayor seemed genuinely taken with the whole concept & promised he'd be looking at the website himself, soon.

The Mayor then presented a shield-type plaque to Daniel, by way of their thanks for those who have created an opportunity for Walthamstow to be kept 'in the frame', past & present, by & for people near & far. The Mayor then asked about those of us who were present, before we were invited to join him in the lounge area for refreshments. [You'll be delighted to know that the whole, very light-hearted, ceremony was videoed by Jo, & will eventually be put on the WMs website for you all to see. Also, the **Waltham Forest Guardian** photographer was there taking LOTS of photos, including the WMs Group on the Town Hall front steps, too. As if that wasn't enough excitement for the morning, we were then invited to stroll in the Walthamstow Market, with its wealth & variety, by Roger Huddle. {Hard for us gals NOT to take a peep for bargains, whilst listening to Rogers fascinating history of how Walthamstow came about - the market was & still is part of its fantastic 'community spirit'.

After lunch at the Rose & Crown, I was personally chauffeured/escorted by two WMs members - Vince, using his own car & Gillian who offered to be the navigator, while Vince was nipping in & around the back streets, trying to avoid the road works traffic jams. As I'd discovered through my ancestral research four addresses in Walthamstow, where some of my ancestors had lived in the early 1900s, & shown a desire to see those properties as they are now & take some photos of them, as well as to be included in a photo, Daniel waqs kind enough to MAKE IT HAPPEN. One of the places no longer exists but was able to achieve my quest with three of them.

The third one, at 891 Lea Bridge Road [the address shown on my paternal Grandma MILLERs [nee STEWART] marriage certificate in October 1909, had been turned into **The Lamb's Cafe** just after the 2nd WW by the Lamb Family - who, it seems, have long since gone abroad. [It had once been a residential home & occupied by people who were Confectioners. One of my Grandma's sisters worked for them, at that address, as an Assistant.]

I invited my goodly chauffeur & navigator to join me for a treat inside, before speaking with the Manager, a Turkish gent, by the name of Kemal Timur. [The family business is now Gero Ltd, trading as The Lamb's Cafe]. Kemal quietly listened to my story of why I sought his permission to take some photos, inside & out. They had been trading there for the past 13 years, during which time had learned about some of its history which he delighted in sharing some of it with me. He then explained that the wooden chairs were the 'original' ones from when it was opened some 70 years ago. Also, they had a separate back room area where they had 2 glass pictures displayed on the wall there, too which are over 70 years old.

Kemal, a very amiable soul, not only agreed to me taking photos but, while I was finishing my little snack, he took photos with my camera of the outside & inside + of me & my companions. Then I took photos of the beautiful pictures & Gillian took a photo of me, Kemal & another gent - to mark the moment!. {Yup! I'll be sending these to Daniel for him to assess for the WMs website suitability.] If you're ever in the area, you'll be able to enjoy a host of meals, snacks, etc at very reasonable prices - I couldn't believe how inexpensive it was for the food & drinks I paid for - really generous portions, too!

By 4pm We met up with others at the Sir George Monoux School for another warm welcome & refreshments, before being guided around what has now become a huge complex. It was an opportunity to meet people from all walks of life, some of whom had actually been pupils there when it was a Grammar Schoo, as well as to hear about some very famous people linked to it..

We finally got back to the Rose & Crown in time for the evening buffet at 6.30pm, before the Evening of **Words & Music Celebrating 'Living in Walthamstow'** began. It was brimming with a whole range of people, again from far & wide, in the little Red Room, at the back of the Rose & Crown (as we were unable to use the upstairs theatre due to another performance).

Sat 25 June, homeward bound - I chose to use the local bus to get me back to Victoria Bus Terminus, which meant changing en route. Each time & got on/off the bus, a kindly soul helped me with my case. Such courtesy & kindness!

Will I remember the people in Walthamstow - you bet yuh! There are saints & sinners everywhere but, I was blessed with the joy of meeting only the Saints. Don't despair, if you were not able to join the fun & merriment on this occasion, keep your eye out on the WMs website over the next few weeks - by which time, we'll have all had a chance to submit our own accounts (if you're lucky, maybe not as long as this one - Ha! Ha! us East Londoners are renound for loving a good old natter!!) along with our photos.

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