'The Creffield Area Story: 10,000BC to the Twentieth Century'

The Inaugural CARA Lecture delivered
at St Martin's Church, Hale Gardens
on Thursday 12th May 2011

by

Dr Jonathan Oates
Borough Archivist & Local History Librarian
London Borough of Ealing

It is possible that this part of the present London Borough of Ealing has the earliest known local history. I will be talking about how this district developed from earliest times, though will concentrate on the past two centuries for these have seen the greatest changes. I will talk about the prominent buildings, the famous tennis club, Ealing Common, former builders, streets and inhabitants, the district during World War Two, and late-twentieth century developments. By special request I have included a few references to the district's connections to one of the twentieth century's most notorious murderers.

The Creffield Road Conservation area historically was split between two different authorities, with the western part, running northwards along the east side of Fordhook Avenue northwards, across Creffield Road and **Oakley Avenue** being part of the parish of Ealing and the eastern section being part of Acton. Although this boundary was not obvious, except on a map, it was important because it led to residents in the same streets (Creffield Road and Oakley Avenue) paying different rates to different local authorities, as well as having different councillors. For example, in 1911 Ealing residents paid 6s 11d rates, those in Acton paid 8s 3d. In 1965 the boroughs merged and so this distinction is no longer of any contemporary importance. As a reminder, however, you may still see road signs stating, after the road's name, 'Borough of Acton' and 'Borough of Ealing'.

In the late nineteenth century, a large number of Stone Age flints were found on what became Creffield Road. Quite why there should be so many found in one spot is another question, but possibly this was where these flints were chiselled into tools. Once this was described, anachronistically, as Acton's first industrial site. To summarise the findings, 500 flints were found, dating from 10–12,000 years BC and we owe this find to **John Allen Brown**, an amateur archaeologist who lived in Ealing and who founded Ealing Library in 1883.

Not much is known about Ealing and Acton's history in the subsequent centuries. We know that they were part of the manor of Fulham, held by the bishop of London at the time of Doomsday.

There was a parish church in Ealing from the thirteenth century, this is **St. Mary's Church**, and the district, as with so many others around London, was a rural, farming community. The road from London to Oxford via Uxbridge which passed through Ealing and Acton was used by travellers, including the itinerant courts of the mediaeval monarchs. It was then known as the Oxford Road.

We know rather more about the district from the eighteenth century. The parish map of 1777 notes the main features. Perhaps the most striking one for modern readers is that there was so little housing. Ealing and Acton were small villages at this time, and furthermore, the built-up areas for both were mainly around the churches. Elsewhere were open fields and, near our district, the Common. This made it a potentially dangerous and lonely place, with travellers being fearful of robbers and footpads.

One of the more prominent buildings was **Fordhook**, just on the boundary between the parishes of Ealing and Acton. It was originally a farmhouse, dating from the seventeenth century. It was demolished in 1902 and subsequently the houses of Fordhook Avenue and **Fielding Road** now stand on the site. It has had two famous occupants. The first was Henry **Fielding**, who owned it from 1752–1753. The parish map of 1822 states that he wrote *Tom Jones* whilst here, but since the book was published in 1749, three years before his ownership of the house, this seems unlikely. Fielding moved to his Ealing house in 1753 to escape the health hazards posed by the capital's noxious smoke, and to rest from endeavours as a busy magistrate. Ealing's air was thought to be most beneficial to his health. Regrettably, he did not recover and in 1754 went on a trip further afield and unfortunately died in Lisbon.

The other renowned resident was Lady Noel Byron. She was active in the parish and founded a school for the children of poor parents on Ealing Green in 1834. They were to be instructed in practical skills as well as book learning. Furthermore, there were no corporal punishments. There was also a bridge nearby over the Bollo stream which crossed the road. There was also a line of trees just to the east of **Fordhook**.

Another significant house in the district was the **Elms**, dating from the early eighteenth century and, amazingly, still standing today, as part of the Twyford Church of England High School. The house dates from about 1735 and was built by Charles Morren. Its first known occupant was Sir Joseph Ayloffe, lawyer, antiquarian and Keeper of the State Papers, from 1737–1749. For much of the next century it was owned by the Weggs. At this period the house was added to, with west and east wings dating from 1758. It had extensive grounds and a large fishpond. The house and grounds were later owned by **Farnell's**, a company manufacturing teddy bears and it is thought that Winnie the Pooh was born here.

The house was bought by Middlesex County Council in 1954 and became Twyford Church of England **High School**. Subsequent additional buildings were erected to the east of the eighteenth-century house, which became the sixth-form block. The

additions included a three-storey classroom block in 1957, a technical block in 1967–1968 and a sports hall in 1988–1989.

What later was Twyford Avenue was then called Green Lane and was also called Wegg Road, too, for fairly obvious reasons.

The tithe map of 1840 shows who owned the land here and the use to which it was put. Some of it was owned by the Wood family, who were the most prominent landowners in north and east Ealing in the nineteenth century. They owned meadowland by the railway, but arable land too. Other land, 33 acres in all, was owned by Elizabeth Wegg, again as meadowland and arable land. Then there was the land around Fordhook, all of which was owned by Lady Byron, about 10 acres in all. This was used for a variety of purposes, including kitchen garden, an orchard and a meadow, as well as gardens around the house and outbuildings.

Ealing Common also merits a mention. It was less distinguishable then than now, because it was surrounded by other fields, not bricks and mortar. As common land it was held by the lord of the manor, the bishops of London, but by the later nineteenth century was vested with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The 1866 Commons Act allowed local authorities to own such land, and in the following decade that it was Ealing Council did, buying the 47 acres for the fairly nominal sum of £500.

By the 1860s there was little change in this district, despite the railway line passing just to the north.

There was a farm on the south east side of Hanger Lane, Hanger Lane Farm, a dairy farm, from 1883. One of its owners was William Cotching, who was succeeded by his son Joseph. Whilst he was farmer there, there was a fire to a rick, causing £300 of damage and an accident when a farm worker fell on a pitchfork and was taken to hospital. By the 1930s it had become a depot of United Dairies and remained there until the 1970s.

It was the late nineteenth century that the district began to be transformed. This was mostly because Ealing's population was expanding and the place was changed from a village to a town – 'a country town near London' as its promoters referred to it. Why was this? The railways are usually quoted as being the main motor of change. Indeed, the GWR built a line running through Ealing which was opened in 1838. Yet this did not instantly herald a commuter boom. At first there were only a very few trains stopping here and in any case Paddington was a long distance away from London's centre and the City. It was in 1863 that the Underground line, the Hammersmith and City line, opened, which made commuting a more practical option, for then one could take an underground train eastwards from Paddington. By the end of the century there was the **District line**, too, and a more frequent and cheaper overland train service. So in the long term, the railways did make a difference, but it took decades before their effect was fully felt.

Other important transport innovations were the **trams** in 1901. These ran along the Uxbridge Road from 1901–1936 after much initial controversy. The fares were cheaper than the trains and helped increase the number of lower middle class and working class inhabitants of Ealing, whose population doubled from 1901–1911. Finally, in the 1920s there was the Central Line of the Underground, making travelling to London and back even easier.

Most of the district is residential. If we examine a few streets in 1891 we will find who the first residents were, what jobs they did and where they had come from.

In the Ealing side of **Creffield** Road there were 12 houses, and of these, five had names. Most residents were fairly affluent. For example, William Squire was a surgeon from Bedfordshire, aged 65. He was living with his wife, his son, who was also a doctor, and three unmarried daughters, none of whom was listed as having any paid occupation. They had a cook and a housemaid, and none of them had been born locally. All Squire's children were born in Marylebone, his wife was from Leeds and the servants were from East London and Kent. It is also interesting to note that five out of the twelve households were headed by a widow.

Some of the residents had been born overseas; Major General Charles Barry, retired, was from Ireland and his wife from Calcutta. Joseph Hanwell, a neighbour, was a retired soldier, too, and he and his son had been born in Gibraltar. George Martin, a bank manager, was born in Bombay.

Of these 68 people, only eight had been born in Ealing and none in Acton. Of these eight, most were children, suggesting that their families had moved to Ealing in fairly recent years. Some people had chosen this district to retire to; the number of widows living on their own means and the retired soldiers suggests this.

It was an affluent area. This can be shown by the fact that those heads of household in work had professions of merchant tailor, brick manufacturer, bank manager, doctor and those of independent means or army pensions. Their sons, if still living at home, had professions too, including shipping, banking and insurance clerks, a medical student and a young doctor. And, of course, there were the servants. No middle class household would be without one, and so all these houses, but one, had servants, from one to three in number, usually a cook and a housemaid. Servants tended to be young, in their teens or twenties and occasionally early thirties. In the 1890s they could expect an annual wage of £14, plus food and lodging. Ealing had the third highest ratio of servants to households in greater London; only Kensington and Surbiton had more.

Another indicator of relative affluence is the fact that there were a number of tennis courts and clubs in the neighbourhood, which was not the sign of a working class neighbourhood, as was the case with south Acton. George Orwell in *Coming up for Air*, a novel written in 1939 but which features scenes in Ealing in the 1920s, made fun of the social pretensions of those tennis players. However, it is undeniable that playing tennis was an important part of the social life of the district in the early

twentieth century. In the 1930s there were five tennis grounds and two bowling greens in the district.

Ealing Lawn Tennis Club, founded in 1882, moved to Creffield Road in 1906, after having been near St Leonard's Road, West Ealing. The move was due to 'the invasion of bricks and mortar'. This was one of the first lawn tennis clubs in the country and was originally an archery club, too. It cost £540 to prepare the new site due to the need to level the ground, cut down trees and turf it. A loan was taken out and members gave two performances of 'The Yeoman of the Guard' at the Victoria Hall to raise funds. They had 20 grass courts at the beginning. The club's teams did well and the Ladies often won the county championships. Three Wimbledon winners were club members; Mrs Hilliard (on six occasions), Mrs Sterry (on five) and, best known, Mrs Lambert Chambers, who won the Singles seven times. The First World War led to a decline in membership and usage, but by the 1920s membership numbers rose to 244 and teams started appearing in county finals again. In 1926 four hard courts and a car park were established. The club celebrated their golden jubilee at a dinner in a Mayfair hotel in 1932, but unfortunately Mrs Chambers was too ill to attend. Her achievements are celebrated on a blue plaque on **St. Matthew's Vicarage**.

The Elms estate, which included **Twyford Avenue** and Creffield Road, was being persuasively promoted by William Daley and Company, builders, in about 1910. Their houses were 'well built freehold and leasehold residences, fitted with every modern convenience, including electric light'. Leasehold houses in Twyford Avenue and Creffield Road cost £700–£1,100, or could be rented at £58 p.a.

We can also find who built the houses, most of which were constructed from the 1880s to the 1920s. Although houses had been built in Creffield Road in the 1880s, they were still being constructed as recently as 1905–1910, by W. Daley; these were numbers 41-47, 48 and 50 and 52, being the last to be built. Fordhook Avenue was built between 1905–1910, by Blount and Kendall, many of the houses being built in six months. Most of Byron Road was built by the same builders, too, at about the same time. The names of both roads, of course, derive from the building which once stood there and one of its foremost former owners. Building in the 1920s tended to be of garages, such as those springing up in Creffield Road and Oakley Avenue. Oakley Avenue was built by Daley, too, though in two stages. There was some building in 1910, but most occurred after the war, between 1920–1924. He also built Western Gardens in 1909–1910.

Hale Gardens, incidentally, is named after Sir Matthew Hale, an eminent judge who lived in Acton from about 1667–1676, and there is a carved stone image of his head on St. Mary's church. Oakley Avenue is named after Daniel Smith, Son and Oakley, a firm of London estate agents who commenced to sell building plots on Creffield Road in 1882.

We should probably say a little about William Daley himself. He was born in Devon in 1848, and spent most of his working life as a builder. Firstly this was in Willesden,

then in Surrey and then in West Ealing, trading as Daley and Akers. He lived at 8 Twyford Avenue and had a telephone installed. He was married, with three children. His last project was the Elms estate, with 220 houses built by 1910, described as 'a good class of property, which certainly has brought much revenue to Acton'. He worshipped at Acton Wesleyan chapel, but suffered from heart problems and Bright's disease. Despite holidaying abroad and on the coast in 1910, he died at home in the December of that year. He was described thus, 'an extremely affable and loveable man and, though much absorbed in business, he was constantly engaged in quiet acts of charity towards his fellows'. He was buried in a Hanwell cemetery and it was noted that a nephew who attended was one Arthur Daley…

There are a number of other important buildings in the district. Firstly there is **St. Martin's church** on Hale Gardens, which has stood there since 1906. The foundation stone was laid on 6 January of that year, and the architect was Edward Monson and Sons, a well-known firm of Acton architects. Monson built several schools for Acton council and was himself an Acton councillor. It is a red brick building with stone dressings and dark grey bricks at its base and a red tiled roof. There are two aisles and two transepts.

Originally there had been an iron church near the site, from 1903, though this was only temporary. It was said, in 1906, that every year about 1,000 people were coming to the district and that the church might well be too small. At the consecration, the bishop of London said that 'in a respectable district such as Acton, sin was just as rampant as in the slums of the City'. There was a packed church on this occasion and admittance to the reception afterwards was by a shilling ticket only. Among those present was Herbert Nield, the new MP for Ealing.

Then there is the school which began its existence as the **Haberdasher Aske's Girls** School, once in Hoxton and now in Hertfordshire. It is a livery company school, and existed in Acton from 1900–1976. Mr H.W. Stock, surveyor to the company, was the architect. The new school cost £60,000 and was opened in 1901. It was a public school for girls, aged between 8 and 18. It was necessary to pass an exam to enter, and there were scholarships available. Preference was to be given to the daughters and granddaughters of Freemen of the company. Cookery and needlework were key subjects, but a modern foreign language had also to be learnt. When the school was opened it was described as 'one of the most important and up to date girls' public schools in the western district' and 'an exceedingly fine and well-appointed building'. It had space for 350 pupils, and there was a chemistry lab, a cookery room, a needlework room, an art room and a gym. The playground was two acres and was laid out as a tennis court and a hockey pitch.

Unfortunately, the first headmistress, Miss Millar, died in 1903 to be replaced by a Miss Margaret Gilliland. She, unfortunately, died young and her niece, named after her, still lives in Twyford Avenue and recently celebrated her 90th birthday. In Miss Millar's opening speech she had said, 'the greatest glory consisted not of never falling, but in rising every time'.

The school relocated in order to be next to the boys' school at Elstree in Hertfordshire and Ealing council took over the site. There was talk of excavations there for prehistoric remains, but this does not seem to have happened. Cardinal Newman High School took over the premises in 1976 and moved in 1987 to merge with Cardinal Wiseman's School in Greenford. It is now the **Japanese School**, having been extended westwards in 1989, a private school catering for boys and girls aged 6–16.

This is not a shopping district, but there are a number of shops along the Uxbridge Road, mostly near to the Ealing Common tube station. The parade of shops was founded in 1924. Using a Kelly's directory for 1926 we can see what these shops were. They included a garage, two music teachers, a doctor's surgery, a petrol station, three banks, eight clothes shops, a hairdresser, a shoe shop, ten food shops, three tobacconists, two dairies, a post office, an oil shop, two dyers, an insurance broker, a chemist, an estate agent, a photographer and a wine merchant.

There was some bomb damage to the district during the Second World War. Several houses in Twyford Avenue were hit during the Blitz of 1940 and there was a particular tragedy when number 34 was destroyed and an entire family killed. This took place on the night of 18 October. At 34 Twyford Avenue there lived a Jewish family. There were Esther and Ralph Aaronberg, a married couple in their 30s, Abraham and Gella Feldman, a couple in their 60s, and Gertrude and Harry Feldman, another couple in their thirties. Abraham had been born in Polish Russia and had arrived in England in the 1900s, possibly fleeing a pogrom. He had set himself up in business and had had a tailor's shop in Ealing High Street in the 1910s and 1920s before moving to the West End. Alice Kussman was also living there and was killed, too. Happily, the newspaper report of this raid notes that there were some people in the house who escaped alive. No. 32 did not escape unscathed, either, as Margaret Davies died in a raid on the same night. No. 34 was destroyed outright and nos. 32 and 36 were so badly damaged they had to be demolished. Number 38 was also damaged, too.

The mini Blitz of 1944 also brought death to the locality when bombs struck three adjoining houses (12, 14 and 16) in Hale Gardens on 23 February, killing Helen Flood, Herbert Haigh, Robert Dunlop, Daisy Wright, Emily Styles, Charlotte Taubenschlag, Catherine Smith, Gertrude Sherwin, Cyril Marshall and James Muirhead, Elsie and Shelia Saunders and Ada Wood. On the following day, Ivy and Margaret Sadler of 92 Fielding Road were also killed. Margaret was aged 14 months.

However, it should also be noted that bombs often fell and were not fatal; in fact that was usually the case. For instance, a bomb fell on the garden of 40 Twyford Avenue on 29 November 1940 and made a crater, but did no damage to the inhabitants, though the property was temporarily made uninhabitable. There was a high explosive bomb dropped which hit the junction of Twyford Crescent Gardens and Hale Gardens, but without damaging people or houses.

In May 1941 an incendiary bomb fell through the roof of St. Martin's church and set fire to some of the pews. Fortunately, there were a number of sandbags nearby. The Rev. Leonard Spiller, Vicar until his death in 1952, saw the flames and rushed into his church to put the sandbags over the flames. Others, including the acting Scoutmaster, assisted in putting the fire out. There was dust everywhere, but members of the congregation and Girl Guides came with dusters to make sure everything was clean in time for the next service. No trace of damage was visible when there was a civic service held there later in the month.

There isn't time to go through every air raid of 1940–1944, but anyone wanting to know whether their own property or street was damaged can consult the records held at Ealing Library, but please make an appointment to do so as some records are held offsite.

However, there was a wartime tragedy involving a former resident of the district in 1944, but this was not known until 1953, and in briefly recounting this I will stray just outside our boundaries. In the 1920s and 1930s Muriel Amelia Eady, born in 1912, was living with her strict aunt at **48 Cresswick Road**. On her aunt's death in 1939 she moved to Putney to another aunt, who was rather more liberal and Muriel enjoyed a good social life and had a regular boyfriend. In 1944 she was working at Ultra Electrics in Park Royal. Then, on 7 October, she left home and never returned. It was presumed she had been killed in the V2 rocket attacks then raining down on London.

Yet in the spring of 1953, the police uncovered two skeletons in the **garden** of a little terraced house in Notting Hill. Following a statement from a former tenant of that house and the forensic examination of one of the skeletons, which was without a skull, the identity was ascertained. It seemed that Muriel had left home to make an appointment with a work colleague who promised he could cure her catarrh. On arrival, he gassed her, assaulted her and then strangled her before burial. When his dog found her skull five years later, he flung it into a nearby bomb damaged building where it was found and assumed to be part of a victim of an air raid. Her killer, **John Reginald Halliday Christie** of **10 Rillington Place** (whose biography will be published in 2013), was later hanged for the murder of his wife.

A prolific burglar, 39-year-old engineer Frank Collyer, who has links with the above case, was active in Acton, and indeed in Twyford Crescent at this time. On 25 January 1953 he broke into number 15 and stole clothing to the value of £175 from Mrs Rae Harris and on 16 February stole £80 worth of goods from 48 Churchfield Road. He had had nine previous convictions, dating from the 1930s and was arrested when he arranged to meet one of the people he had robbed, claiming he could help restore their property by them buying it back from him. His victim contacted the police and they arrested him when he met her. Collyer was the on and off boyfriend of Hectorina MacLennan, whom he had lived with in February 1953 before being arrested. He later said that the two were in a milk bar in Notting Hill Gate when they saw a balding, middle-aged man, and Hectorina said that she knew him and that he was trouble. However, this, if true, did not prevent her from accompanying the man back to his rooms on 6 March (after having stayed there for three previous nights

with Alexander Baker, another boyfriend), where she became the final victim of John Christie. Collyer's estranged wife worked as a welfare officer at Acton Town Hall and gave Hectorina gifts and advised her to return to her family and children in Scotland – advice fatally disregarded. Collyer was given a two-year gaol sentence in May.

But we will now return to less unpleasant topics. The shops on the Uxbridge Road in the 1970s indicate social changes of the post-war years. There was the Automatic School of Motoring, Antiques etc., the Lantern Restaurant, the Taj Mahal Restaurant, the Quick Clean Laundrette and even a DIY shop and a travel agent. All this shows the impact of greater affluence, as eating out and holidays overseas were the norm. It also is indicative of immigration from overseas, especially from India. As noted, earlier residents from India tended to be from colonial and army families.

This part of the London borough of Ealing was to prove attractive for Polish arrivals and also for Japanese people. The latter's presence, especially of young families, can be accounted for by the school, London's only specifically Japanese school. Ealing has, along with Barnet, the largest number of Japanese people living in London's 19,000 strong Japanese community, many of whom work in finance and business.

There have been Polish residents in Ealing since 1940, due to people fleeing the German/Soviet invasion and occupation of 1939. Embassy staff found the District line convenient for travelling into work. After the war, with the Communist regime in power in Poland, many felt they could not return and stayed in west London, with Hammersmith, Acton and Ealing being preferred places of residence. In more recent times, with the entry of Poland into the EU in 2004, more Polish people have arrived and it has been estimated that the borough of Ealing has the largest Polish population in the UK. Before the consecration of the Polish Catholic church on Ealing Mall, relevant services were held in St. Matthew's.

The 1970s also threw up a few problems for residents. There was a serious fire at number 23 in June 1973. It was a large detached house which had stood derelict but was now being converted into five flats. The flames were 20 feet high and the roof collapsed. At first, not knowing it was empty, a man tried to see if he could help anyone in there get out. The cause was unknown but arson was suspected as there had been another mystery fire in Acton a few days earlier, at Thomas Huxley College.

There was also concern about a hostel for homeless men being built in the locality in 1975. The county probation service wished to house 12 ex-prisoners in the former Silverdale girls' school, which stood derelict. Most residents opposed the idea, believing 'it will be full of habitual criminals, that it will lower the tone of the area and that their houses will be in danger'. Children and the elderly were said to be especially at risk if the scheme went ahead. A minority voice in favour of the plan claimed, 'These people must have somewhere to go. People around here like to live in a little dream that it is still a posh area, but it is not. There are mostly flats around here now.' As a result of this proposal, a residents' association was formed. Councillor Michael Gardiner said, 'A Residents' Association is needed in the area.'

A subsequent Chairman of the RA, Anthony Rowland, a civil servant, faced other worries about the neighbourhood. Rowland said, 'We want our area to be made into a conservation area because some building alterations are adversely affecting it. Unless you can make alterations to a uniform standard it is better to keep things as they are.' The group had the support of the local MP, Sir George Young, who promised to lobby the Environment Secretary, then Michael Heseltine. Young declared, 'That particular part of the borough was built and planned as one unit and it still retains the coherence of a village. If there are many more conversions or alterations the nature of the area will be changed.' As we know, the residents' association's wish was granted, although not until 1993, and was extended in 2004.

The Creffield Road district has changed a lot since prehistoric man lived here over ten thousand years ago. For most of its history, however, this was a very sparsely populated area, north of the Uxbridge Road between Acton and Ealing with just a few houses and meadowland and arable land. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that significant change occurred. This was partly due to better transport links of tram, railway and underground, but also due to a general increase of population and movement away from large cities and the formation of suburbs. This area was built up from the 1880s to the 1920s. In some ways it is fairly similar now to the scene a century ago, but there have been changes in both people and its environment. Anyone wanting to know more about a particular street, house or other building can do so by visiting the library, preferably by appointment, as we have a collection of maps, photographs, electoral registers, books and archives which should shed more light on your particular interest.