CHAPTER V

Just round the corner of Wandsworth High Street, at the bottom of St. Anne's Hill, outside the "Two Brewers", stood the charcoal oven with its fragrant smell of roasting chestnuts and "Murphies", steaming hot and delicious. Being a well-brought up little girl I never dared to buy any, much as my heart, or perhaps the region under my pinafore, longed for them.

Behind the "Two Brewers", hidden from the bustle of the main street, there still remains a charming little courtyard with cottages which might have been lifted direct from some country town.

A trace-horse had his stand close by to give the aid of his powerful limbs to heavy horse-drawn vehicles on their weary progress up East Hill.

Half-way up the slope of the Hill is "The Elms", until recently a doctor's house, standing back from the road. The upstairs drawing-room has a lovely carved wooden mantelpiece of great antiquity showing ducks sailing on the Wandle in the days of the ancient bridge,

erected by order of Queen Elizabeth I.

Her descendant on the throne of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen Victoria, used often to patronise Wandsworth, driving either to a glass shop standing above little steps with an iron balustrade where the new Municipal Buildings give quite an aristocratic appearance to the High Street, or else to her dressmaker in Geraldine Road. The appearance of the little dumpling of a lady, with her regal presence must have caused much excitement among the Wandsworthians.

The back garden of "The Elms" slopes up through grass grown terraces, overgrown with blackberry bushes to a small square building amid the trees, built with enormous thick beams, heavy brickwork, an outside staircase and three windows on its upper floor, from which in former days a clear view of Wimbledon was obtained. It resembles a similar building on Telegraph Hill where it is known that in the old days signalling by means of mirrors was carried out.

"The Elms" at one time belonged to two old ladies. When the hedge and fields at the end of their property gave place to the villas and backyards of Ridgemount Road the horrified ladies caused the erection of a

brick wall twenty feet high, so that the eyes of the proletariat should not feast on their doings. It is still complete with substantial buttresses and gives quite an educational idea of the Great Wall of China.

When Herndon Road on the east side of the garden arrived in the course of "progress" the ladies erected a tall wooden hoarding which now, like the ladies themselves, has gone the way of all earthly things.

A romantic rumour states that a tunnel ran from the cellars of "The Elms", under East Hill to Wandsworth House opposite, but no trace of it can be found, although workmen laying tramlines on the spot years ago found traces of brickwork. Rumour also tells that "The Elms" housed the frail, but undoubtedly beauteous, lady friends of some notability at Wandsworth House. The lovely wrought iron gateway of the latter between its tall pillars has vanished and part of the house itself is converted into a public garage, complete with petrol pumps. The former inhabitants, the Misses Cunley, were visited by friends in carriages and pair complete with coachman and footman. Many and rare must have been the antiques which were sold when the old ladies had passed to their rest. One sensational item comprised

two old flower stands, apparently worth about five shillings each but which brought in the sum of two hundred pounds.

Not far away at St. Anne's Hill, then known as "The Grove", lived some friends of ours in another old Wandsworth house with lovely sweet scented lilac trees, mauve and white in the back garden. The lady of the house, handsome and upright, her hair piled high, her silver crucifix round her neck, sweet and dainty in her silks and laces, sat enthroned in her drawing-room, surrounded by four daughters, all dressed in white. Many visitors came to that drawing-room, including the various generations of clergy at St. Anne's and from those days comes the sad story of the Curate and the Cake-basket. This unhappy young man, true to the type pictured in the penny novelettes of the period, was so shy and so clumsily polite that one afternoon he knocked over the three-tiered cake-stand, scattering the contents far and wide, so that slices of bread and butter stuck to the glass of the china cabinets.

Old Dr. Chave, the long-lived Vicar of St. Anne's, whose quarrel with Grandfather threw him into the arms of the Wesleyan Methodists, was bidding the stately lady

of the house goodbye in the hall at Christmastime, when one of her naughty young sons drew attention to the fact that his mother was standing beneath the mistletoe. The gallant Vicar stepped forward and kissed her at the precise moment that a maid appeared upon the scene. With commendable presence of mind the clerical gentleman slipped on the polished floor, sitting down with a most unecclesiastical bump upon the ground.

His vicarage, a white-walled house with extensive grounds stretched for nearly a quarter of a mile to Garratt Lane, then truly a lane with hedges blossoming with honeysuckle and wild roses, has been replaced by a great viaduct connected with the Wandsworth Sewerage System. "Living Chess" was played at some of his successors' Garden Parties on the lovely lawns. The flower-beds rich with rainbow coloured blossoms, the tall gracious trees, all are gone, leaving only blocks of somewhat depressing flats, from which even the name "Vicarage Terrace" has now departed. "Sic transit gloriam Mundi."

The Wandle really was silvery in those days, flowing between flowery tree-lined banks beneath Queen Elizabeth's bridge in the High Street, to lose itself a short distance

away in the all-embracing arms of Father Thames. Romantic rumour maintains that the Virgin Queen used to sail in all the pomp and circumstance of her Royal Barge up the little inlet where the Wandle emerges into the stream of the great river, but it must have been much wider in those days or the Royal Lady would have certainly undergone great risk of running aground and being seriously late for her appointments.

Pope wrote of the Wandle, as "The blue, transparent Vanalis". In ancient times Wandsworth had to contribute salmon to the Monks of Westminster, which in 1450 gave rise to a most violent dispute. In these days of modern development of the fair land of England the only salmon found near the Wandle appears in tins strictly graded.

Water from the Wandle was at one time suggested as a beverage and a prospectus of a company proposed to be formed in 1833 propounded a scheme to supply the southern suburbs of London, including Clapham, Battersea and Wandsworth itself, with "pure and wholesome water" taken from the Wandle.

The prospectus further stated the river had been surveyed, gauged and analysed by eminent "chymists" and proved to be a pure unadulterated stream". A gruesome

sideline was the further reference given by a Parliamentary statement of 1828 concerning the danger of Thames water which had formed the supply up to 1833 and into which one hundred and twenty-nine common sewers, numerous gas houses, dyeworks, etc. discharged their refuse between Chelsea and London Bridge. But even this horrid thought did not rouse interest in the Wandle waters and Wandsworth failed to take its place with Harrogate, Vichy and Aix-les-bains.

Isaac Walton speaks of the Wandle trout, speckled with marble spots like tortoise, whom another writer credits with a most unchristianlike obstinacy and immoral shrewdness.

One author described the Wandle between the High Street and the Thames as "the sink of Surrey" but lest this should be misunderstood, the explanation is that he merely meant to convey the information that the water from outlying Surrey sank away at this spot into the Thames. We Wandsworthians hope that was his meaning, but it is rather shattering to discover the London County Council classifies the river from which our home town received its name, as a sewer.

To be perfectly honest, a stranger standing on the

modern bridge in the High Street looking down upon its greasy, murky waters might be tempted to think the L.C.C. was not very far wrong. Only a very blue sky reflected in its depths and the sight of the great trees in King George's Park a few hundred yards away, could disillusion him and even so, he should be strongly discouraged from looking northwards over the other side of the bridge.

Wandsworth considers itself a maritime borough seeing that the Wandle empties itself into the Thames, which latter river flows into the sea, although admittedly some distance away, with all London's bridges in between. The Borough Coat-of-Arms with its up-to-date motto "We Serve", has as its crest a ship in full sail, its figure-head being a saucy-looking dragon with its tongue well out.

The sad tears which ornament the shield are said to represent those shed by the Huguenots who in the latter half of the seventeenth century found refuge beside the "Silvery Wandle" when religious persecution drove them from their own beloved land of France.

They worshipped in a little approximately one hundred year old building just off the High Street, which received the name of the "French Chapel", to be replaced

in 1882 by a "Memorial Chapel" built as a mark of gratitude to the Huguenot Settlers. It is now occupied by the firm of Crookes' Labatories Ltd. whose celebrated halibut-liver oil and capsules save many citizens of this realm from an early grave, so that the site having ministered to souls for nearly four hundred years has now undertaken the care of bodies. In March 1948 the laboratory made a gracious gesture to its former occupants by erecting a tablet commemorating the past associations.

The Huguenots did not only weep when they came to Wandsworth but proved themselves of real solid worth to the community, introducing market gardening, which still survives near my home in the form of Neal's Nursery, where gentlemen who have undergone a rest cure or otherwise in the prison are greeted on their exit from those formidable doors by a view over quick-set hedges of neat rows of roses, cabbages, ornamental shrubs and youthful trees. A narrow path leads through the centre, where the wild "tea" plant sheds its soft foliage and wee mauve flower over the wooden palings. Here the public are permitted to wander and imagine themselves at a distinctly considerable distance

from Charing Cross.

To those who walk a few yards farther on over Heathfield Road bridge and look over the low wall, a row of quaint cottages is revealed with little gardens running down to them filled with old-fashioned flowers and bushes cut into the form of birds.

Close by are the dangerous cross-roads at the top of Earlsfield Road, which have witnessed many accidents, the most spectacular being a baby-car which turned violently upside down and from which the four occupants emerged only very slightly harmed. Another event was the running of a lorry full tilt into the corner fence to the extreme surprise of the chickens who lived the other side. As it contained a variety of handcuffed convicts the situation was somewhat awkward. Neither of these gentlemen was apparently much hurt and they were provided with seating accommodation on the edge of the Common until another vehicle came to their rescue. It is very convenient that for a number of years a doctor has lived in a house on one of the corners.

It can be very windy there also as I found one day in a heavy gale when I was blown off the pavement into the street. Happily one of the many cars and

lorries which in later years have torn across that spot regardless of cross-roads, thirty miles an hour limit and prettily worded exhortations erected by a trusting Borough Council, was not passing at the time. Simultaneously with my displacement from the pavement a long wooden fence on the opposite corner crashed to the ground with a horrid shattering which if there had been a passer-by would have immediately rendered him a patient for the neighbouring doctor, or a candidate for the not far distant cemetery.

Another nasty experience befell me at that same corner on a recent cold Christmas morning as about 1.30a.m. I was returning from the Midnight Mass at St. Anne's.

A car stood outside the corner house, apparently unoccupied. Yet a sinister foreboding seemed to tell me that all was not well. Somewhat shrinkingly I looked closer and saw that the driver's door was wide open, and, a most unusual occurrence, lying flat back against the side of the car. Still more timidly I moved round the car and looked in at the open door. There, in the cold, dark loneliness of that early Christmas morning, I saw the driver fallen forwards over the wheel, ominously silent and still, his hands hanging limply

down on either side, to all appearances dead! Had he had a fit? Was he murdered? Or was it a heart attack? Horrified, I retreated to the pavement considering my next move. Obviously I could not leave him there. At that nasty moment an angel in the form of a man came off the Common and advanced towards me, looking, it must be confessed, extremely taken aback when I addressed him, saying there was an unconscious person in the car beside us.

But the angel was possessed of considerable resource and presence of mind. Telling me to remain on the pavement, but not on any account to move away as he might want me for a witness, he went round to the open door of the car and spoke to the corpse. For a few moments all was silence, till apparently the angel shook the corpse, when it suddenly and revoltingly came to life and was most loudly and horribly ill.

"That's right," said the angel, "you will feel better now."

The process was repeated several times until even if the corpse felt better I certainly felt worse. In desperation, shivering with cold, and somewhat squeamish under the pinafore, I enquired whether I might go home.

The angel came to me, telling me that I had probably saved a life that night, for if the corpse had awakened and tried to drive the car in that unhappy state he would certainly have killed himself or someone else. To this flattering statement the angel added that he lived quite near and would deal with the matter and that I must go home at once. I obeyed him and it did not take me very long either.

Over an extremely welcome cup of coffee, I meditated on the extreme contrast between the beauty of the Midnight Mass with its lights and incense, the white vestments of the clergy gleaming with blue and silver orphreys, the lovely singing of the angels' hymn, "Glory to God in the highest and in earth peace goodwill towards men", the supreme moment when God incarnate, the Babe of Bethlehem came again verily and truth to his faithful people as they knelt before the altar - and so short a time later that sordid scene when man in celebrating that same Holy Birth had permitted himself to sink to so low a level.

A fortnight later on the same spot I met the angel again and recognising him endeavoured to express my heartfelt gratitude for his knight-errantry to a lady

in distress.

The angel responded suitably, then added, "Had you gone when the lady and gentleman stopped their car and asked if they could be of assistance? They drove the man's car on to the Common to park it for the night and took him and his wife home in their own car."

"His wife", I gasped. "I did not see her."

"No," replied the angel, "I am not surprised. She had fallen under the seat at the back of the car."

Well! Well! Well! But it is evident that the Good Samaritain still walks this queer world of ours!

Close to this corner are long gardens at the back of a row of delightful old-fashioned houses whose ancient windows look on to the lime and chestnut trees bordering the Common where in winter youths in decorative pullovers play football often slithering and sliding on the sloshy ground. The owner of the end house, whose side window shows the view of a gracious antique spinning-wheel, walking in her garden where lilac trees hang over the high wall, found a child helping herself generously at the flower-beds. On being questioned, the infant replied, "We have no flowers at home, so father says it is only right we should have some of yours."

But to return to the Huguenots, those stern God-fearing refugees of three hundred years ago. They brought not only market-gardening to Wandsworth and a strict observance of the religion of the Reformation, but also a very hush-hush process of felt hat-making, contrived from the hair of bears, beavers and rabbits. The fame of their achievement spread throughout the world and no one who considered himself anyone, would have been seen outside his door unless he were wearing a "Wandsworth hat". But even greater glory was forthcoming when the Huguenot refugees added to their work the industry of making the red hats for the Cardinals, so essential a part of those exalted ecclesiastics' equipment that the "Cardinal's Hat" has become a symbol of his office.

A few recollections of the Huguenots still remain in Wandsworth, the chief being their ancient cemetery, where at the top of East Hill the road forks on the one side in a straight line through miles of small shops to Vauxhall, on the other side to Clapham with its wide, very tame Common, incorporating the old parish church and attractive round pound, all embraced in the wide sprawling arms of the Borough of Wandsworth.

The noisy clanging trams which formerly swayed and jostled on one side of the little Huguenot cemetery have now passed to their rest, but a multitude of buses, roaring and squeaking, pass by continually, and on either side, cars, lorries, bicycles, contribute their share of shaking to the ancient dust which lies beneath the drooping trees, the soft green mounds of turf, and the grey tomb-stones bending sideways with honourable age. A little winding path passing through the cemetery connects the two main roads. Merely to set one's foot upon it brings a sweet, unearthly calm, a peace set in the midst of turmoil, a sensation of eternal rest, of a glory of life everlasting.

On one side of the path a tomb ornamented with a stone crown and bow of ribbon bears the inscription, "Miss Sally Grose, Died December 21, 1704, Aged 10 years and 2 months."

Funerals in those old days often took place at night and it must have been a grim and awe-inspiring sight to see the torchlit procession moving up East Hill to the dark tree-shadowed cemetery.

A more ancient name for the Huguenot Cemetery is Mount Nod, not because the bodies of its inhabitants

are asleep, but probably owing to an ancient British place of worship, "Nudd" being the Pluto, or God of the setting sun. It is not difficult to visualise an ancient stone altar set on the top of the hill looking westwards across the sparsely inhabited valley to the wooded hill of Wimbledon, behind which the sun would sink majestically to rest in a glory of crimson and gold. What form of worship, what sacrifices and tears were offered at that stone altar none can tell, but to those who stand on the steps of St. Anne's Church a quarter of a mile away, some of the glory of those sunsets can still be revealed, particularly on a night when angry storm clouds throw the crimson and gold into even wilder splendour.

Other memories of the Huguenots are retained only in the names "Huguenot Place" and the block of flats magnificently entitled "Huguenot Mansions". The "French Horn", a house of refreshment conveniently near, bears a less romantic remembrance.

The Presbyterians were first established in Wandsworth in 1572, over a hundred years earlier than the Huguenots, their coming being endorsed by a document entitled the "Orders of Wandsworth". An old press cutting records

that it was lawful to "assassinate any man who opposed the Gospel". It is to be hoped the law is not still in force or the cemeteries would soon be over-crowded.

One zealous Nonconformist endeavoured to assassinate Sir Christopher Hatton, believed to be an enemy of Puritans. Unfortunately he stabbed another man by mistake, which made things very awkward all round.

But that was very long before we came to live in the Earlsfield Road. As an only child I suppose I was lonely, but never when I was at home, only when I was among other children whose teasing ways I never understood, so that school life was a veritable purgatory. At home I had Winkie, my cat and my beloved dolls, especially Eva, a white beauty, whose complexion early suffered from the effusion of my kisses, and Topsy, a demure looking little person with close black curls and a face of the same colour. These two important little people had to be undressed and provided with their nightgowns before my darling long-suffering Mother saw me safely tucked up myself.

I also had a perpetual delight in the shape of an extensive dolls' house composed of orange boxes, where I continually changed the wallpaper, carpets and furniture,

probably to the disgust of the miniature cook and housemaid who resided in the kitchen department with their cooking stove and other accessories, dressed in correct uniform - pink print frock, white cap and apron for cook; black frock, lace-edged apron and cap for the housemaid.

An early love of Fairs found expression in a social event entitled a "Pin Bazaar", where my Mother was the sole customer and armed with quantities of pins, purchased for ten, fifteen or twenty of this commodity, various articles she did not require, mostly of my own manufacture - pen-wipers, pin-cushions, a few sweets, or miniature blotting books. At the end of the Sale, which I enjoyed hugely, the pins were all returned to Mother for a future occasion.

At the top of the garden I possessed a minute piece of landscape laid out as a farm, with fields, hedges and other agricultural necessities. Close by was my seesaw, on which my little friends performed much braver antics than myself and usually left me stranded out in the cold, wondering whatever people could see in tea-parties when the guests took no notice of their youthful hostess. One day I decided to see how many times I could run round the seesaw without collapsing. Happily my godmother

found me not long before this would have happened as I certainly did not feel too good when she rescued me.

My Christmas parties were more enjoyable, for Father used to give a wonderful conjuring entertainment, at least to our youthful eyes it was wonderful, with flowers growing miraculously out of empty pots, yards and yards of narrow strips of coloured paper, blue, green, yellow, red, purple, orange, flowing at a tap of his magician's wand from a tinkling tambourine; and, best of all, quantities of pink and white sugared almonds falling like luscious rain from his Sunday tall silk hat.

I suffered from one serious drawback in the fact that my birthday came only four days after Christmas, with the result that although everyone expected both a Christmas and birthday present from me, they only returned me a combined effort to cover both days. Only those whose birthdays fall in that same period will appreciate to the full this devastating experience.

Earlsfield Road was more interesting than it is in these days when it seems to be more or less a speedway to Wimbledon, its straight mile-long length acting as a strong temptation to even the most conscientious motorist. But in those days there were few cars and the horse with his rhythmical, sometimes dancing, hooves,

and occasional high-pitched laugh, his glossy back, supremely held his own.

One of my youthful obsessions was that I should see a horse fall down, a horrid sight which my youthful eyes had witnessed on more than one occasion, the dear patient beast, lying in a suffering heap, his eyes wide and terrified, a band of men hurriedly loosening his traces and lifting him to his feet. Happily I never saw anything worse than this, but it was more than enough for me.

Another horrid sight, fortunately very rare today, was a gentleman or even a lady who had enjoyed decidedly more than "one over the eight" and rolled gaily or half-unconsciously from one side of the road to the other, occasionally not disdaining the use of a lamp standard as a leaning post. These gentry I avoided like the plague, for fear of what might come next.

A lunatic boy with an enormous lolloping head, which moved continually from side to side with a sickeningly circular movement, was another of my youthful antipathies. Poor lad! He was always surrounded by a mob of children, pitifully endeavouring to shake them off, together with their cruel laughter and teasing.

Another suffering, unhappy creature passed our house one day, a large brown bear, led by a string, painfully walking down that long, long hill on his back legs. Whether animals have a future existence, a Paradise where they will have no fear and no torture, is known only to their Creator, but it is certain that one day when the Archangels sound the trumpets of judgement and the Great Books are opened, many a man and woman will be convicted before the Great Throne for torture and suffering inflicted on the animal creation.

One strange sight in this metropolitan area was a drove of pigs who waddled and grunted up the road, to the wild terror of my cat who was visiting a sweetheart in a house closeby and nearly lost all his nine lives at the sight of them.

The muffin-man passed down the road in those good old days, tinkling his bell, his long flat basket, with its green baize cover, perched precariously on his head.

A smiling little basket-maker used to move briskly along the pavement, his small form concealed by the large firm baskets he had made or mended, destined for the butcher, the baker or the grocer.

The descendants of the men who used to sit on the pavements mending cocoanut mats and cane chairs still come to the door with hanks of cane and twine in their hands, with the same unlikelihood of their job being a lasting one as earlier in the century. There is also an occasional visit from the gentry guaranteed to grind knives and scissors into a form that will never cut anything again and charge the earth for doing it.

The ingratiating individual still calls occasionally who has just laid a room for your neighbour down the road and has a roll of linoleum left over which he is prepared to sell at such a ridiculously low figure he is really giving it to you. My advice is to allow him to keep it for himself. One of our confiding maids bought his roll for several pounds and asked him to take it to her sister in a road about a mile away, to which he consented with overwhelming courtesy. The sister is still awaiting for the linoleum, or perhaps this is scarcely correct, as in the interval she has passed into a realm where linoleum is not required and our maid has married the sorrowing husband.

The man with his raucous cry, "Ripe Strawberries", used to be a regular visitor during the season, but is

now a very rare bird. The rag-and-bone man with his tinkling bell and pretty little pony is a far more familiar sight and seems to have an enormous number of twin brothers, exactly like himself. None of them has ever been seen to do any business, but his cart is always full of junk and mysteriously bulging sacks so that he and his kind evidently do not perambulate the road merely for their health.

The cats-meat man with his Pied Piper following of felines and canines, for the moment all strictly under the olive branch, no longer makes his round with his basket containing wooden skewers stuck with two revolting pieces of meat.

The person who used to put a small packet of impossible sized needles marked "Please spend a penny on a poor old man", has evidently long since been gathered to his fathers, so evidently have the many hefty, ruffianly looking beggars who used to frighten our smartly uniformed maids into giving them coppers from their wages. These of course may now be converted and working in Government offices complete with perms and shiny attaché cases containing their knitting.

A favourite pastime of mine in those early days

was climbing up the staircase banisters on the outside - a precarious journey which was never discovered by an adult and one which I certainly should not care to attempt in these my maturer years.

Soon after my first decade, St. Anne's held a missionary exhibition in the Town Hall. Together with other innocent children I had my face and hands well browned, and dressed in a sari took part in the missionary tableaux. In one scene the heavy front curtains of the stage caught in a tall screen bringing it down with a crash with me underneath it, from which I had to crawl in full view of the audience, who probably thought it was the kind of thing that happened in India.

In the refreshment department an hour or so later, the churchwarden remarked to my Mother that he had been in India and that in my make-up I was exactly like an Indian child. Seeing the fright I looked my Mother was certainly not flattered, especially as I was meant to appear of a very low caste indeed.

A few weeks later, with the aid of some enthusiastic small cousins, I reproduced the tableaux in our boxroom at the top of the house. The outdoor scenes were represented by branches of privet taken from the garden

and stuck into cracks of the floor. The indoor ones, particularly the palace of the Rajah, were rich with everything colourful I could beg or borrow from my long-suffering Mother.

As the English lady doctor I miraculously restored the Rajah's best wife to the land of the living and in the dispensary scene cured a variety of ailments. All went well until I opened a medicine bottle to fill it with one of my life-giving elixirs. Alas! It was one of Mother's bottles which had once contained her evil-smelling medicine and had not found its way to the dustbin. The efficient lady doctor staggered backwards, the patients gasped, and the audience, being nearer the door, made a hurried and undignified exit.

It was for occasions such as these that Mother made boxes of home-made sweets, dates, raisins and prunes stuffed with chocolate or cocoanut fondant; pink and white shaggy shapes made of castor sugar with walnut or hazel-nut on the top, flavoured with almond, lemon or chopped nuts. I loved to help her prepare them, but I fear my help was more in the line of continual tasting, rather than actual assistance.

My Mother, even in those days, was growing deaf,

owing to scarlet fever when a school-girl, so that she feared that malady almost as much as the plague or smallpox. Great was her horror to find the boy next door was suffering from that disease and blowing bubbles from his bedroom window in the direction of my own.

We had various maids, smart girls with caps and aprons, who usually came from Mrs. Woodham's Registry Office on St. Anne's Hill, opposite the Sorting Office. Rumour said the lady found situations for the girls, then offered them something better. Her knowledge of the private business of all the gentry of the neighbourhood was prodigious and her generosity in retailing it perfectly astounding. Her discrimination between gentry and "real gentry" was unerring.

Often dreadful altercations took place in front of her door on the flight of steps leading up from the narrow pavement. Irate mistresses complained bitterly of the appalling maids she had sent them, and that she was never to send them any more like that again. To which she would reply loudly and emphatically that certainly she would not - never no more!

The mere sight of her filled me with unreasoning terror, but to do her justice she was always courteous

to my Mother and sent her good maids who only left us to be married or to leave the neighbourhood.

One of these girls came from a family of ten, her father being a stalwart Battersea policeman. She was a thorough Cockney who described herself as being "not so green as she was cabbage-looking". Her tales of her family's doings were a continual delight.

"Mum went out to buy some bloaters. One wasn't half a big 'un, so she picked 'im out by 'is tail saying that one would do for her. And when 'e was cooked 'e was that salty she couldn't eat 'im. Serves you right, Mum, we all ses, fer being so greedy."

It was in those early years that I was taken out of bed one evening and wrapped in many shawls, allowed to watch the mile-off spectacle of McMurray's paper-mills in Garratt Lane flaming up into the blackness of the wintry sky. That was real melodrama free and gratis for the youngsters, as the factory was burnt right out and the fireworks exploded in all directions. Real tragedy accompanied this super Guy Fawkes display, for several of the girl workers were killed. Their pitiful, shattered young bodies were buried in one grave in Magdalen Road Cemetery, just behind the Chapel. Each

A few years previously a firework factory near the old inn, "The Leather Bottle", caught on fire.

girl had a separate stone with her name, but they are all indecipherable now.

I did not see a great deal of my Grandfather in those days, as he usually called when I was at school and as no children were allowed in that Holy of Holies where he resided at Spencer Park it was not until the last year or two of his life that I forgot my fear of him and began to love him for his brilliant mind and the real affection he then showed me.

He often arrived at our house with a present for Mother of seakale beet, a detestable vegetable which tastes like solidified water. But as Grandfather with all his wealth, used to point out, it was so economical, as its lower halves could be cooked like celery and its uppers like spinach. Of all the other good things in his well-stocked garden, we saw very little, except an occasional basketful of crab-apples, or a few of his really delicious Spanish radishes, a winter delicacy in shape like a small turnip, coal-black on the outside and snow-white inside, sweet as a nut. I have never seen or heard of any since his day. Grandfather also had radishes which grew on little bushes and some strange vegetables called Colrabbi.

At Christmas time he sent to each of his grand-children a five-shilling postal order, accompanied by a letter stating that this munificent gift must be put immediately into the Post Office Savings Bank. I hope I have never been a worse hypocrite than when I wrote a letter of fulsome gratitude by return. In those days one penny a week was considered quite sufficient pocket money for all boys and girls until well into their teens. Many quite charming toys, including small dolls and furniture for their residences, could be obtained for a penny and the gift of that coin by a generously-minded adult would provide an ecstatic half-hour in a toy-shop deciding how best to spend it.

The sweet-shop was usually patronised at the rate of a halfpenny or even a farthing a visit and I remember to this day the devastating experience of irretrievably dropping a whole pennyworth of cocoanut ice in a muddy spot on Wandsworth Common. Many years later a beneficent Borough Council marked almost the exact place with an Air Raid Siren whose screech was distinctly far-reaching.

Several people of my acquaintance were dragged from the wreckage of their homes after a bomb had exploded a hundred yards away, one of them being rescued from a

blocked air raid shelter, from which she had torn away the emergency bricks with her own poor hands, being carried to safety by the tender pitiful arms of the air raid wardens. Although she returned to her shattered home at the first sign of dawn, it was scandalous to find how many of her possessions had already been stolen. Not that this was always the case, for in many Wandsworth homes, certified unsafe for habitation, where all the windows were gone and sometimes part of the walls, pictures, ornaments and furniture, mute and pathetic wreckage of war, remained for weeks, thick with the cruel, stifling bomb dust, yet otherwise untouched.

But this was many years after we school girls used to visit our favourite sweet shop "Bloss", at the entrance to the High Street, next door to Garry the veterinary surgeon and close to Stampers, the coach builders who had the annual honour of sumptuously lining the coach of the Lord Mayor of London. It was only a few minutes run down East Hill to "Bloss's", but I fear it often accounted for our being home late from school at teatime. A succulent portion of that said teatime for me often consisted of thick slices of bread with a

deep layer of raspberry jam, crowned with a generous supply of cream.

Bloss's was also the official "tuckshop" of the Technical Institute opposite, to whose students it supplied ices and hot drinks, imbibed on high stools like a modern snack-bar. The Proprietor, whose kind heart thoroughly understood the ways of that baffling creature, the school-boy, allowed a small credit on the hot drink account. When the height of this credit was reached, so gentlemanly were the whole proceedings that not a word was uttered, but instead of the requested lime or lemon drink the customer was confronted with a "peppermint" beverage, which when tasted proved to be nothing more exciting than plain hot water.

A sideline on the Bloss establishment was the sale of mulberry leaves from a tree in their garden for the nourishment of the silkworms which many boys and girls kept as pets for their soft golden silk. I possessed some once myself, but their fat, bloated caterpillar bodies as they grew to maturity gave me the shivers and I never really liked them.

Old Wandsworth was rich with many mulberry trees, another inheritance from the Huguenots who had carried

on their silk industries in the district.

The registers of Wandsworth parish church contained many interesting entries, one being in 1545, that "kine were kept by the church" and let out to the inhabitants on hire, under sureties. A payment for repairing the parish umbrella is also recorded. Whether this useful and presumably sizeable article were used for sheltering dainty ladies stepping from their carriages on wet days, or to save the parson from a drenching when conducting funerals in the graveyard round the church, is unrecorded.

Many plague entries appear in these registers round that fatal year of 1665, a reminder that the village of Wandsworth so fair and peaceful amid its cornfields and orchards, beside its silvery, dancing river where many watermills made rippling music, lay on the main highway from London to Portsmouth. Very soon the dreadful disease made its appearance among the terror-stricken inhabitants; the awful red cross was painted upon their doors and as the sinister death-cart rumbled nightly down the street, accompanied with the raucous cry, "Bring out your dead", the Wandsworthians bore out the bodies of those who perhaps but a few hours before had been healthy, loving husbands, wives, sweethearts or friends.

Two plague-pits were dug in the neighbourhood, where beneath the fitful light of a torch, the dead were tumbled in with frightened haste and no "benefit of clergy". They probably contained not only the poor dreadful bodies of Wandsworth's own victims, but also possibly some of those brought from the "villages" of Westminster and Charing, or even farther, from the City of London itself.

That some of the victims may have escaped the death-cart and mass burial is possible from the records of Wandsworth Parish Church, many of the entries bearing the letter "P" showing the owners of the names died from the Plague.

A number of other entries record death from drowning, probably due to the many mills which worked on the banks of the Wandle; thirteen corn mills being mentioned in Domesday Book. One sinister entry for January 2nd, 1670 records "Richard Langham, Miller, ~~Murdered~~" murthred".

A curious fate befell these treasured registers of Wandsworth Parish Church. During the Second World War the Vicar and churchwardens quite rightly decided that the church safe did not provide sufficient security, so they were removed to the vaults of the Bank which stood

conveniently next door. But strange and unpredictable are the ways of modern warfare. A high explosive bomb shattered the Bank to pieces. The vaults remained unharmed, but into them soaked quantities of water, used to quench the fire, so that when the precious registers were retrieved the pages with their historic entries were stuck fast together in a noisome mass of pulp. The church lost the top of her tower, but the safe remained inviolate and unharmed. It is evidently possible sometimes to be too careful in this modern world of unforeseen terror and catastrophes.

Wandsworth Parish Church can also claim its Martyrs, for on July 8th, 1539, the Vicar, John Griffiths, together with his chaplain and two members of his household, endured the terrible fate of being hanged, drawn and quartered in the neighbourhood of the Old Kent Road for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy, which secured ecclesiastical predominance to the Crown, excluding the authority of the Pope. Legend relates that the unfortunate Vicar left his dying curse upon all things ecclesiastical in Wandsworth. A letter written on the date of his very unpleasant exit from things temporal, states, "This day the Vicar of Wandsworth

suffered at St. Thomas à Watering with another Priest and two Friars. God have mercy upon them if it is his pleasure!" The last words suggest a rather unkind doubt. St. Thomas à Watering was a church on the Canterbury Road, now the Old Kent Road, where the pilgrims to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket watered their horses at a brook at the end of Albany Road.

The melancholy note of the deep-toned bell which sounds across the valley from the Roman Catholic Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury on West Hill bears the name of John Griffiths, the fine tower which enshrines it being erected in 1927 to his memory. Certainly the bell sounds as though in perpetual mourning.

The Friends' Meeting House not far from the Parish Church, was first erected in 1674. Its successor, built in 1778 still remains, its heavy iron and wooden door leading direct from the pavement of the busy, noisy High Street into a colonnaded porch with stone floor. The actual Meeting House on the right with its half-panelled walls and Madonna blue cushioned seats receives a generous supply of sunshine from the great South window.

Beyond is the ancient graveyard, tended with loving

care, where the white tombstones stand in a soft green lawn, bordered with a walled garden beautiful with many-coloured snapdragons and gracefully drooping wisteria. An astonishing peace and quiet pervades this old and tiny graveyard, a sense of calm and other worldliness, so that it is difficult to realise the incessant traffic and bustle of the London streets are literally but a few yards distant. Rather comes the remembrance of the Divine Words, "Come ye apart and rest awhile".

The land was originally held by one Joan Stringer under the Lord of the Manor. She was buried in the little graveyard wrapped in a woollen shroud in accordance with the prevailing law passed in 1666 to encourage the woollen industry, "One or more of the relatives of a deceased person shall see within eight days after the death and make affadavit under the hand and seal of two or more witnesses that the person buried was buried in a woollen shroud and not a linen shroud." The Act was repealed in 1814, a year before the Battle of Waterloo.

The Quakers found the first winter in their new Meeting House very chilly as the heating apparatus was an extremely chancey affair. On one occasion the caretaker's wife was "one and a half hours a-laying

and a-lighting and a-blowing the fire to a good heat".

The caretaker's house still stands next to the Meeting House, quaint and old-world, its front door opening straight into the street.

A famous member of the congregation was Robert Barclay, who founded the brewery of Barclay, Perkins and Company. He owned a large family of pretty children and a very handsome garden and altogether lived in great style.

Daniel Hanbury, the head of "Allen & Hanbury", was appointed Reader of Scripture at the morning meetings in 1899. He and his daughter Rachel were among some of the last burials in the little graveyard.

Knowing the abstinence and sobriety of the Quakers and the relative smallness of the Wandsworth congregation, it is a little surprising to read that at a feast in 1728 eight gallons of beer were consumed and 5/4 spent on wine and tobacco.

On this occasion twenty-five pounds of "loyne of beef and suet" were provided for the total cost of 7/6; twenty-nine pounds of veal at 4½d per pound; a peck of beans for 10d.; "pudings" 9/3, and various other delicacies including "6 cabbidges, 6 colloflowers and cucumbers

with salad." The servants who waited at this feast came off rather poorly with 1/10d. between them.

Four of the "Friends" refused to share in this feast at the Rose and Crown but "stayed and ate by themselves at Ye Ram."

"Ye Ram" still stands near by at the four cross roads, joined by the big brewery which bears its name. When the pungent, though not altogether unpleasant, smell of its brewing spreads in the direction of Charing Cross, we local inhabitants have a sure sign that the wind is in the due west and that mackintoshes and umbrellas may soon be needed. The magnificent horses which two abreast draw the brewery drays are always sleek, shining and perfectly groomed. They win many prizes for their owners. On one occasion when some of the beer barrels were being rolled down the opening in a pavement leading to the cellar, one of the horses decided he would like to follow the barrel. His descent into the cellar was fairly easy going but returning him to terra firma was distinctly a major operation.