



# NEWSLETTER

No. 58

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## INTRODUCING OUR IT DIRECTOR – JOHN CROFT

**J**ohn Croft graduated with a degree in chemical engineering in 1963. He set his sights on living in Cheshire close to the Merseyside chemical industry, which uses salt from the Cheshire salt mines. This is the museum for which Matt Wheeler is now the curator. However, as a keen photographer, a chance read of an advertisement for a newly qualified chemical engineer to work at the Kodak processing plant in Hemel Hempstead caught his eye and so Cheshire was left to the celebrity footballers of the future.

John settled in Boxmoor where he has lived ever since. Here he raised a family and now is patriarch to no less than 12 grandchildren in his extended family.

His career with Maylands Avenue lasted for eight years when he transferred to technical support for motion picture and television marketing at Kodak House. He worked both in UK and abroad fixing problems and introducing new products to film and TV companies and laboratories.

Retirement came in 1993 followed by several years of consulting within the same industry. He is particularly keen on the use of international standards and again travel to meetings extended to Tokyo, Beijing, and Hollywood as well as numerous European capitals both west and east.

Interest in computing was nurtured by the Sinclair ZX81 and Spectrum and early Apple in the 1970s but it was the advent of the IBM PC the following decade, which seized his imagination first as an industrial tool, later as a means of manipulating images in photography.

When he sought volunteer activities in the late nineties he came across a certain Mike Stanyon who had thousands of photographs, a PC and a scanner and needed some one to get them to provide images for Modes. Soon after, the familiar Darleks were born and the rest, as they say, is history.

*John Croft*

We are very grateful to John for volunteering his skills, he literally keeps DHT running, saving us hundreds of pounds each year, he manages to squeeze every ounce of use from our ageing IT equipment.



### **The Dacorum Heritage Trust Limited.**

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## THE EVACUATION PROJECT



### TALES FROM A SUITCASE

**D**H T is working together with the Hemel Hempstead Movie Makers to produce an educational DVD. We are looking for people with childhood evacuation memories of wartime Dacorum.

Did your family host evacuees? Were you evacuated? Were you at school and remember evacuees coming to your school, either a few or an entire class evacuated together including their teachers?

Some evacuees were made so welcome and looked after so well that they are still in contact with the families that they were billeted with during WWII. Others were not so lucky and had bad experiences.

We would love to hear from you if you have any local memories or photographs of life during the Second World War?

If you would like to join those people already sharing their precious family memories for this project, please contact the Curators on 01442 879525.

## THE LONG WINTER

**W**ith global warming and the greenhouse effect, could it be that those who lived through the winter of 1962-63 experienced conditions that will never be repeated? A sixpenny pamphlet published by the Manchester Guardian at the time makes chilling reading and it is a fascinating reminder of a time almost forgotten, although only thirty years ago.

The winter, 53 days (35 consecutive) were classified 'very cold' that is 2.7° C. or lower, and for 18 days (9 consecutive) the temperature remained at or below freezing throughout the whole day. These figures refer to the London area. For the country as a whole it was the coldest since at least 1829-30, or since 1740 according to some views.

The first snow of the winter fell on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1962, but the really cold spell started on Boxing Day with the temperature at Bournemouth touching minus 8° C. The snow continued and on 30<sup>th</sup> December five people died in snowstorms over Southern England; it was estimated that 95,000 miles of roads were snowbound. The Met. Office then hinted at the possibility of a thaw, always a bad sign! The next day five more people died; conditions were described as comparable with the severe winter of 1946. The Met. Office decided there was not going to be a thaw after all, and events proved them absolutely right. Then with masterly timing men at 26 power stations decided to ban overtime and 'work to rule'. Their spokesman, Charles Dayle, claimed "Roughly one third of the electricity supply industry was affected". The Met. Office looking on the bright side reported that seven towns had beaten the December sunshine record of 100 hours, which had stood since 1917!

New Year's Day brought blizzards to the South of England and more than 500 lorries from all over the country queued for rock salt at a mine in Cheshire. The AA reported that the only thing travelling up the M1 was the snow. Vegetable prices rose rapidly, not surprisingly as I recall, a crowbar was required to get my parsnips out of the ground, but as everyone knows the flavour is improved by a touch of frost.

The farmers throughout England suffered. In the South West the RAF dropped foodstuffs for the livestock, and near Wootton-under-Edge 400 sheep were buried in snowdrifts. Farmer's in Dorset threw away 250,000 gallons of milk over a three-day period, as it could not be collected. The Dorset Farmers Union secretary, M R Mitchell, commented, rather mildly in the circumstances, "The weather certainly caught us a clout in the pants this time."

The power workers then recommended an official 'work to rule'. On 7<sup>th</sup> January the temperature dropped to minus 22° C. at Grantown-on-Spey, Morayshire. A few days later the Central Electricity Generating Board said London had only survived the peak demand by the skin of its teeth, and voltage was reduced throughout the country. On 11<sup>th</sup> January shop stewards representing London power stations voted for a more rigid application of the 'work to rule', and worse still the football pools were cancelled yet again. Though at last a compromise was reached in the power workers' dispute, unofficial action and record demand caused more blackouts in the South East.

The fifth week started with a weekend of blizzards; another of those ill winds, which blew nobody any good. Ice floes stopped the ferry in the Bristol Channel, and trains were trapped in drifts in Hertfordshire among other places. By 22<sup>nd</sup> January, for the first time since 1947, large patches of ice were seen drifting in the Mersey off Liverpool, and pack ice appeared in the Solent, Humber and off the East Anglian coast; at Eastbourne the sea froze 100 feet offshore along a two-mile stretch.

January 23<sup>rd</sup> was generally the coldest night of the winter, and London buses were out of action with frozen fuel; the railways had good reasons for delay with diesel fuel frozen, immovable points and water frozen solid. The end of January brought a slight thaw, but blizzards followed. At East Grinstead foxes began to hunt in pairs, and cat owners were advised to keep their pets indoors. On 13<sup>th</sup> February the Met. Office accurately prophesied that temperatures would rise. Flood warnings were issued.

It was not until 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> March that there was a night free of frost throughout Great Britain; about 11 weeks after the cold snap began. During that time 49 deaths were directly attributed to the weather.

What happened nationally, of which what I have written is but a sample, which was of course reflected locally. The manager of the Eastern Electricity Board in Hemel Hempstead appealed to customers to keep demand down, especially at peak periods, and a policy of making power cuts by switching them around various districts was adopted rather than leaving one area without power for a long period. Building came to a complete stop. The Hemel Hempstead Gazette carried photographs of snowmen, shopping by sledge, and a picture of Christopher Weaver of Bargrove Avenue, Boxmoor, in an igloo.

With the weather at its coldest boats were trapped in the ice at Two Waters and elsewhere. A windspeed of 46 mph. was recorded locally, which made conditions even worse. Mr Major, Chief Inspector of London Transport at Two Waters, said only two buses had been able to operate in Hemel Hempstead one morning due to frost affecting engines and fuel. There was a shortage of smokeless fuels, which affected the Highfield smokeless zone, but residents were assured no one was watching the chimneys, except of course the rather higher number than usual which caught fire and had to be attended by the fire brigade. However it was not cold enough to stop filming of "Z Cars" in Bank Court, Marlowes!

Then came the thaw, with relief from the cold but inconvenience to those with burst pipes. It was reported that burst pipes occurred in 204 out of 1,300 properties owned by the Hemel Hempstead Rural District Council. If the total housing stock in the area were taken into account that was obviously just the tip of the iceberg.

The climatologists probably had suitable explanations for these polar conditions, but a letter to the Guardian put forward a theory based on the observation that the Artic spell followed the adoption by the weathermen of degrees Centigrade, and that things were rarely as bad when the Fahrenheit scale was in use. Quite so! And it must be conceded that the correspondent was well qualified, nominally at least, to expound on the subject – it was J M Winterbottom of Sydenham!

*Peter Ward*

Sounds familiar? It is hard to believe this article, written in the early 1980s, and not a review of the recent few months.

## ARTEFACTS FROM THE COLLECTIONS - ANTIQUE DOLLS



*Left* - Doll with a bisque head with brown human hair stuck to the head, a composition body with ball joints at shoulders, elbows, wrists, thighs and knees. She has glass 'sleeping eyes' with wax lids, painted eyebrows and lashes, open mouth showing upper teeth with painted lips. She is wearing a hand-made knee-length pink silk dress with pin-tucks, crochet and embroidery trims. Underneath she wears cotton drawers and chemise, two petticoats of cotton and flannel, and pink finely knitted socks and white leather shoes, which would have originally been fastened with pink ribbon. The front of the dress is quite faded; the original fuchsia colour can be seen at the back hem. It is thought that this doll is of German origin and dates from around 1910.



*Right* - Doll with beautifully painted white porcelain head with moulded hair and hair band, ceramic arms hinged at shoulder, ceramic legs with painted ankle boots and hinged knees and hips. Dressed in a hand sewn white dress with red rosebud design, pink bow, elbow-length sleeves trimmed with lace at the neck, sleeves and hem. Net and lace slip and pantaloons. Her age and origin is unknown.

Both these delightful dolls are from the Kings Langley Local History & Museum Society collection.

## FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES & EVENTS



### 2009 DITLOID QUIZZER

This was the sixth year a quiz sheet has been produced to help raise funds for Dacorum Heritage Trust. The number of completed quiz sheets was up from last year. The winners were Pat and Ian Cheese from Berkhamsted. They are pictured here receiving their £20 John Lewis token from Isobel Aptaker.

This year we raised over £200. We would like to thank everyone who took part and helped to raise these much-needed funds.

### 2010 Quiz Night

This year the Quiz Night was held on Saturday 30th January in the Sunnyside Church Hall, Berkhamsted. Over 50 people took part in nine teams, five of which represented the Friends and constituent societies.

Our thanks go to Simon Musgrove who did a marvelous job as Quizmaster for the evening. The scores were close with three teams tied for fourth place. The unbeatable Kings Langley Local History & Museum Society won the John Nichols Memorial Trophy for the fourth time.

Over £150 was raised from the event. We would like to thank everyone who supported us with our fundraising.



### A NEW ARRIVAL

Many of you will remember our former curator Catherine Peet, who became curator when Matt Wheeler left the company in the Spring of 2005. We have received some very happy news from the Peet family in rural Lincolnshire.

At 8:12 am. on St. Valentines' Day Catherine gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, Isaac Benjamin. He weighed in at an impressive 8lb. 9oz. at birth. This is her second son.

Everyone at Dacorum Heritage Trust was delighted to hear this news and our best wishes go to David, Catherine and Isaac's older brother Joseph. We welcome Isaac to the DHT extended family.



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*The Dacorum History Digest*

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