Hand Copy

"A Hertfordshire Man Remembers"

By

E. Lawrence

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Sketch of Writer of these Notes.
“A Hertfordshire Man Remembers” E. Lawrence, August 1960.

In this short narrative it is my intention to recall some of the more interesting things that have left lasting memories with me. Give me the good old days. I was born on March 6th 1902, in a small cottage within sight of the famous Chadwell Spring, the source of the New River, which supplies much of London’s domestic water supply.

The view across the lush water meadows to the beautiful Ware Park which lies to the left bank of the river Lee, would still the heart of any country lover.

This large estate of the landed aristocrats of those days teamed with game and rabbits by the thousand. I well remember a large number of the latter were black in colour, which is unusual among wild rabbits.

It was down in the aforementioned meadows that the children of my day used to play, and what fun we used to have during haymaking time in our summer holidays, and in the winter the meadows when flooded used to afford wonderful skating. The ice being thick and clear.

I remember being down on the ice late one night when Halley’s Comet was last seen in this country, the year I think was 1910, or thereabouts.

Christmas in my childhood was a wonderful event eagerly awaited, for then we used to have a rare good feed of everything associated with the period, having saved our pennies over a very long period for the great day.

Another great event was the Whit-Monday Fete held on Hartham Common, with its large fun fair and athlete sports. Some of the great runners and racing cyclists have appeared there from time to time, among them Joe Wells of Ware, who once represented England in an International match over the 100 yards sprint.
It was at the Whit Monday Fete, that I saw my first cinema film, a flickey and wobbly affair, but at that time a truly wonderful thing, far removed from the cinema of today.

The Hartham Common in my early days was a real beauty spot, washed by 3 tiny rivers which were lined along their banks by beautiful willow trees which used to sweep down into the water. It was the pride of the Borough of Hertford. Today this same spot is desolate with all the trees gone and the streams full of weeds and rubbish of every sort. In this crazy age, very little interest is bestowed on such things. I remember too, what was to me an exciting event on the aforementioned common, that was the occasion of the coronation of King George V in 1911. All the schools in the Borough assembled their pupils there and we were given tea and buns.

Hartham was used in the early days of flying as a control point for the annual event of the air race around London, and in 1913 I saw some of the pioneer pilots including Gustav Hamel the finest flyer of his time of racing aeroplanes and Colonel Cody who originated the old Royal Flying Corps at Farnborough long before World War I.

I also saw Mr B. C. Huck’s in flight, this pilot was the first Englishman to fly upside down and loop the loop, a very dangerous feat in those days when planes did not fly in high wind or heavy rain.

On my leaving school I took up horticulture as a profession, this being one of the trends of my family. My grandfather had been Head Gardener to Sir Charles Booth, the Gin Distiller.
My first job on a large private estate was at Easneye Park, Stanstead Abbots in Hertfordshire, the seat of J. H. Buxton Esq.

Here I got a thorough insight into my profession, under a highly skilled gardener, a Norfolk man, Roy by name.

Here in this great garden, the finest I ever worked in, was produced every conceivable fruit and flower worth growing both under glass and in the open, and what a beautiful mansion and park this was. Game was abundant.

The Squire being a great shot, the staff used to be called on to join the shooting parties from time to time to beat the birds and drive them over the guns.

This was an all day event and we used to meet at the Home Farm at mid-day for a hearty feast set out on trestle tables and a good time was had by all, food and drink aplenty.

This place was a complete self contained unit having its own employees for every conceivable job. Wheelwrights, painters, carpenters, dairymaids, laundry maids, even its own church and parson whose stipend was paid by the Governor. It was a great shame when this place went to pieces after the first great war, on the death of the squire.

From Easneye Park I next went in pursuit of further experience to Balls Park, Hertford, the seat of Sir George Faudel-Phillips Bart. Who was the Lord Mayor of London in Queen Victoria’s jubilee year.

This estate also boasted a very fine garden and had the finest shrub boarder I have ever seen anywhere.
being I should think, all of 300 yards long by about 12 yards wide, and containing flowering trees of every conceivable variety. There was also a large conservatory containing the finest specimen of yellow mimosa I have ever seen anywhere, it covered the whole roof inside and the scent on opening up the place each morning was almost overpowering, while beneath it were orange and lemon trees which fruited freely and looked quite normal in size and colour to those seen in fruit shops.

So was on this estate in 1912 that I saw my first aeroplane on the ground, a Bleriot monoplane piloted by M. Manio. This flyer later lost his life while in Portugal, in a plane crash.

My word how aeroplanes have altered since those early days. This one was so frail that one man could easily have picked it up the tail end on his shoulder and wheeled it along. The undercarriage had ordinary bicycle wheels, and its speed was around 50 miles per hour. Incidentally the world’s flying speed record is 2,150 miles per hour by an American machine just a few days ago in August 1960.

My next place was “Queens Hill” this was a much smaller place owned by Lionel Hart Esq. but with a very nice garden, and an owner who was a keen horticulturist who spared no outlay to obtain the latest plants, roses and carnations being first favourites. We had many successes at the shows both locally and at the Horticultural Hall at Westminster. My employer was one of the finest gentlemen I ever met, and I stayed with him for 3 years. He then gave up the place and took up residence in Hampstead, and I
lost a very good friend. I stayed for another 12 years at this place but it was
never the same. So I departed and moved to Stanway, near Colchester. This
place did not satisfy me so I left and went down to Woodcote, near Reading.
This place had once been a farm house and had a very nice picturesque layout.
The house itself was built of flint and had heavy ships timbering in its walls and
ceilings and must have been at least 200 years old.

During my stay here I met many interesting people, my employer being
very fond of house parties. Being of a very enquiring nature, I learnt a great deal
from long conversations from people in all walks of Life. It was here I met that
great sporting personality, Mrs Chester Beatty, who sold a famous race horse a
few months before the Derby. Because she did the wrong thing, the horse, Mid-
day Sun, winning the great Epsom Classic for his new owner. But she took it
like the true sportswoman she was. It was just one of those things and she was a
very generous person.

I regret to say she is no longer with us, she died some 3 years ago in very
tragic circumstances. I was very sorry to hear when I read about it in the paper.

My last place of employment on a really large estate was at Dyrham Park,
High Barnet, which comprised 103,902 acres. Owned by Captain Trotter of the
Rifle Brigade and an extremely wealthy man. This large park and mansion had
been in the hands of this family for 3 generations. The original member of this
military family had been an officer under Wellington at Waterloo.
and his swords and battle maps were kept in the mansion as was a portrait in oils of the said officer in the uniform of the period.

I was in charge of the pleasure grounds, flower beds and extensive lawns around the mansion.

In this place I came into close contact with the fox hunting gentry. My employer being Master of the Fox Hounds of the Enfield Chase Hunt. What a beautiful sight to see, when the hunt was in full cry. The gentlemen in hunting pink, the hunt was about 60 strong on some occasions, and used to assemble round the manor for stirrup cup, the customary drink before setting out. We bred foxes for the hunt, large pits were dug in the woods and filled with brushwood where the vixen could be well hidden from sight.

To lift a gun against a fox in hunt country was considered a crime and anyone doing so would have been frowned upon by the fraternity. Should any poultry keeper lose any birds by marauding foxes, all they had to do was to report their losses to the hunt and they were at once compensated for said loss.

I was on this place when the second war began. My governor sold the whole estate to London County Council for the green belt and moved to a small place in Frome, Somerset, rejoined his regiment and was taken prisoner at St. Valery in France shortly after.

I myself being too old for a military service volunteered fo, and was accepted by the London Fire Brigade. A.F.S. during my service I was able to see the wonderful bravery and fortitude of the population of London.
I have a vivid recollection of August 4\textsuperscript{th} 1914. On a beautiful summer’s day it was, that we declared war on that Bosche tyrant, Kaiser Wilhelm II whose troops had overrun Belgium.

Hertford, my native town being a garrison centre, was at once transformed by military activity. The Herts Militia, a reserve battalion of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Bedfordshire Regt. mobilised for war at once. And it was a stirring sight to see this tough bunch of old sweats assemble on parade, as fine a body of men as any in the British Army.

What a send off that the townspeople gave them when they marched to entrain at the station, on their way to France. And how gallantly they fought in those fateful early days at Loos and other places. And many of those gallant lads fell in action in that terrible inferno of the Somme.

We had another gallant band of fighting men too, whom I shall never forget; the 1\textsuperscript{st} battalion Hertfordshire Regt. (T.A.), one of the first of the “Terrier” battalions to see active service. The very first being a battalion of London Scottish. The Herts covered themselves with glory right through the war and earned themselves the title The Herts Guards. They being brigaded with The Guards of the regular army, and fighting with great distinction at Givenchy and other very tough spots. At the battle of St. Julien they were badly mauled by the Bosche and lost many officers and men including their commanding Lt. Colonel Page D.S.O. The Regt. Boasted two winners of The Victoria Cross; Corporal Burt of Hertford and Second Lieut. Young.
The most stunning military sight I ever saw was the march past our home of the East Anglian Division from Bishops Stortford to Hertford. The march past was continuous from 8 in the morning until 1.30, each battalion in column of fours, with their band at the head, the lads swinging along carrying full pack and singing the famous songs of the day – Tipperary and Pack Up Your Troubles. I must confess that this particular event still brings a lump to my throat, it was the most moving sight I have ever experienced in my whole life, to me absolutely unforgettable, tragic, yet glorious.

In the earlier days of the war, aerial attacks on this country were confined to Zeppelin airships flown by German naval crews. For a time they caused considerable consternation here, but after a time pilots of the old Royal Flying Corps learned how to deal with them and many were shot down in flames.

On the night of October 13th 1915, a number of these craft flew all over East Anglia and dropped bombs at random at various points. One passed over Hertford and dropped bombs doing a certain amount of damage, and killing among others, The Borough Surveyor and organist of All Saints Church.

At a later date in 1916 the airship carrying the Leader of the Zeppelin fleet, was shot down in flames over Potters Bar. Shortly after this, use of airships was abandoned by the enemy, and he turned to bomber planes. London was attacked in daylight, I saw this raid which
was carried out by about 20 planes. These flew in formation and moved with perfect line of flight, as would guards on parade on a barrack square. This was the first squadron formation I had seen. It was most impressive to watch. This business however was soon checked. The crack squadron of Bristol fighters were brought back from the front command by Capt Brian Baker D.S.O. M.C. Croix de Guerre, a very famous officer whom many Hertford people knew personally.

At this time the East Herts Golf Links was used as a Flying Corps landing ground, and I saw many types of fighter aircraft on the ground at close quarters. And many famous pilots in person, including the celebrated Capt. Albert Ball, V.C. D.S.O. M.C. who destroyed 43 Bosch planes in France. This great pilot was unfortunately killed in action at a later date, during an air battle with the crack fighter squadron of the Bosch air force, commanded by Capt. Baron Manfred Von Richthofen, who in his turn was finally shot down and killed by Capt. Roy Brown, a Canadian officer in the Royal Flying Corps.

When the war finally ended on November 11th 1918, there was much relief and a great deal of celebrating, which under the unfortunate circumstances, alas, I could not join in, having had my two brother killed in action and many of my friends also. This I am sure was understandable. Our little community of about 30 or so families paid a very heavy toll in lads who fell in action. My one regret is that some mark of our remembering them was not erected nearby.
The list of those of our boys who fell was:-

Percy Gee
Bill Gee
Charlie Kimnell
Fred Vale
Harry Seymour
John Cutmore
Nathan Cutmore
Ernie Day (Australian Infantry) missing.
H. A. Lawrence (Royal Berkshire Regt.) November 12th 1916 Grandcourt
E. G. Lawrence (Royal Field Artillery) March 24th 1918 Arras

The others who came through safely were:-

Herbert Gee
Ball Vale
Charlie Cutmore
Sid Tookey
Eddie Walker
Harold Read
Fred Kimnell (Sergeant 1st Herts. Regt.)
Wally Kimnell (Sergeant 1st Herts. Regt.)
Tom Ambrose (Sergeant 1st Herts. Regt.)
Ernie Purton (Sergeant 1st Herts. Regt., Later 2nd Lieut: Royal Air Force)
Ken Wagstaff (Royal Navy. H.M.S. Implacable
W. H. Lawrence (Bedfords & Lovat’s Scouts)
“Some sporting Memories”, in the 1920-30 period.

One of my favourite pastimes was my frequent visits to the famous motor racing track of Brooklands, situated in the beautiful woodlands between Byfleet and Weybridge in Surrey. Here I saw the very great drivers of the period, and what thrills they provided. With exhausts open, the roar was terrific and of cause that was the great attraction. All
motor racing’s attraction is the roar that goes with the speed, at least that is my personal impression. The speed aces of the day all appeared there from time to time. Seagrave, Eyson, Cobb, Malcolm Campbell, Birkin, Kaye Don, Dino, Mauriceau, Dario Retsa and last but not least, the great Welshman, Mr. J. G. Parry Thomas. By far, in my opinion, the greatest driver who ever sat in a racing car. This one designed his own cars and Leyland used to build them. The “Leyland Thomas” was the finest track racing car in the world in its day, and many thrills it provided for the onlookers.

I once saw it do a special exhibition lap for the benefit of one of the “Emirs” from the Middle East and what a run it was.

I once was standing beside this great driver and someone asked him why he always drove alone, as most drivers rode with a mechanic whose job was to pump the supercharger. I shall always remember his reply, it was short and straight to the point, it was “one’s enough at one time”. He realised the danger of the sport.

At a later date he was killed on Pendine Sands in North Wales while attacking the world speed record in his very large car “Babs”, which I had often seen on Brooklands. The giant car was chain driven and the terrific strain imposed on it when going at speed, caused it to snap and the famous driver was killed, his head was cut off, a tragic end indeed.

The impact on racing at Brooklands was immediate and attendances dropped very much. The famous “Star” was no longer there.

A tremendous trill occurred in a short sprint
race on one occasion, Jack Barclay, the Vauxhall ace of those days, lost control when high up on the famous Byfleet Banking - which was very steep - spun round backwards 3 times, with other cars passing above and below him. How a pile up was avoided is a mystery. He finally regained control and finished the course. He came out for the next event as though nothing had happened – and won it.

Another driver who had a very narrow escape on another occasion was Major Harvey, in an Alvis car. He crashed in to a telegraph pole beside the track while going at speed and stepped out of the wreck unhurt.

I was able on one occasion to have a very close up view of the first car to do 200 m.p.h. This was the twin engine “Sunbeam” driven by Major Seagrave. The driving seat was between the two power units.

Another famous car I was able to look over with the covers off the engine at the time was a famous Polish driver’s car nicknamed “Chitty Bang Bang”. This huge car was powered by a Zeppelin-Maybach engine, the same as those used in the German airships. The exhaust ports were as thick as a mans leg. The owner, Count Zborowsky, was well known at Brooklands. He was killed at a later date.

In the early days of flying, Brooklands was a famous aerodrome and many famous airmen have appeared there including the first man who ever flew upside down. Monsieur Pegoud of France, who gave demonstrations there in 1913. This pilot was shot down and killed over Belfort in France during the first world war.
“My other very many and varied interests”

I have always been interested in the theatre, and I have at some time or other been to shows at most of the famous London theatres. I have seen many celebrated actors and actresses of the last 30 years or so.

I also like visiting art galleries, museums, and famous churches and cathedrals, of which I have seen many. The most beautiful of which I have always considered, the famous York Minster, as the finest one of all.

I have been over most of London’s historical buildings; The Tower, Hampton Court and Apsley House - former home of the great soldier The Duke of Wellington – which contains many of his personal effects, medals and decorations, swords, etc. And some fine paintings of various generals of his time.

I have also been on board the famous ship Discovery, which the great polar explorer Captain Scott used on his journey to the South Polar regions.

The beauties of the country-side also appeal to me greatly, and I have wondered on foot to many beauty spots. Surrey is my first choice for this, and I think the views from the tops of Reigate Hill and from Box Hill, near Dorking are really superb. Around Mickleham and Leatherhead is also grand country to wander about in. The woodlands are extremely attractive about September when all the foliage is taking on its tint, characteristic of autumn.
Last but by no means least is my interest in all sports, athletics, boxing, rowing and horse racing. Although I do not gamble, I always thoroughly enjoy my visits to Epsom for the Derby. I love watching beautiful horses in action, to me, it’s one of the finest sights in the world.

In the world of boxing I have had many enjoyable hours and have seen some of the great fighters of the last forty years or so in action. Two of the greatest of these I recall were Kid Lewis of Aldgate, a wonderful Hebrew who won the world’s welterweight championship. He was one of the heaviest pinches I ever saw. At the famous boxing hall “Premierland” in London, I was a regular patron for years and saw on several occasions Nel Tarlton, the most scientific fighter England has ever had. At least that was my opinion of this great featherweight who won two Lonsdale belts.

If I have any regrets about anything, I would say that it is the passing of the horse and the advent of the motor car that stands out most firmly. What wonderful animals they were, and how very knowledgeable of what they had to do. All the big railway companies hand many horses for the huge drays which were used for all haulage work. Their days work would begin around 6 am and finish around 9 pm. They travelled deep into the countryside on their rounds of delivery to the numerous inns. On their return at night, I have often seen them threading their way through the traffic quite on their own, with the Carmen asleep in the bottom of the cart. They would go straight home to the yard.
In the early days of motoring in this county there were no tarmac roads, they were just granite and sand surfaced, and in dry weather the dust would rise in clouds higher than the housetops. In winter the mud and potholes were appalling. The garb of these early motorists was grotesque, judged by present day standards. It was comprised of huge gauntlet gloves and heavy Mac coats, and most essential of all when travelling at speed was a large pair of goggles’ to keep dust from the eyes. The aforementioned speed would be around 45 miles per hour. The driver was of course seated high up and very exposed to the weather.

We had in my native town one of the very early pioneers by name Dr Shelley, who possessed a steam driven car of very high performance, and which he continued to drive well after the arrival of the more orthodox type, he in fact would have no other.

I have also many recollections of the time when the ladies first took to riding bicycles, these young “hussies” as they were dubbed by the older generation, wore a special type of clothing, consisting of large baggy pantaloons known as Bloomers, named after the lady who designed them, and a large flat hat, like a dinner plate. What a laugh they would create today.

Another incident I recall was a balloon ascending from the grounds of Christ Hospital at Hertford when I was about 6 years old. What a thrill that was. The aeronaut or pilot I think was Mr. Spencer, a well known balloonist of that time. I think he lived at Highgate in the north London area.
To anyone desiring a wonderful birds-eye view of the greater London area, I would with every confidence, recommend a visit to the tower of the Roman-Catholic Cathedral of Westminster. From this lofty point one can, on a clear day, see I should say a good 25 miles all around, and the buses and other traffic appear like oversize toys.

Another great event was the Great Wembley Exhibition in which I think every part of the empire had a part. The whole affair was on a stupendous scale and quite unforgettable. The Festival of Britain at a later period was quite insignificant by any standards of comparison, nevertheless, in some ways quite interesting.

In my early days prior to the Great War, I paid a number of visits to the great port of Grimsby and saw the herring fleet in its comings and goings. It was here also that I saw some of the early types of submarines of the Royal Navy. These were very interesting to me, with some of my people being closely connected with the Navy. One uncle of mine was a naval draughtsman at Vickers Armstrong’s yard at Barrow-in-Furness. My cousin was a gunlayer on the great battleship Queen Elizabeth, and afterwards served in submarines. He was in the “Battle of Jutland” on board admiral Jellicoe’s ship the “Iron Duke”. This was really the last great naval battle. Fleet actions in World War II bore no comparison.
In my wanderings in the Leatherhead district, a certain long and very high wall by the roadside caught my eye, and it at once seemed to me that I had seen it before. Yet I could not possibly have done so, I had never been in that area. This fact has had me puzzled ever since. It has I think been said that we have had a previous existence on this earth. I wonder if that could perhaps be the real answer to my feelings.

The following details concern World War 2 and happened during my service with the London Fire Brigade.

After the enemy bomber formations had finally been beaten off, both by day and night by the fighters of the Royal Air Force, the Bosche tried again by sending fast bombers over in ones and twos flying at roof top level. One of these came over at lunch time one day and dropped a heavy bomb on Sandhurst Road School, Catford, with appalling results. Over forty children and one teacher were killed. The whole building collapsed and caught fire. I and some of my comrades were sent to deal with the fire. The sight which met our eyes as we climbed over the wreckage was tragic. We kept finding remnants of clothing and kiddies school bags, shoes, etc among the wreckage. I must confess many of us had tears in our eyes as we worked. The work of our comrades of the Heavy Squads was very dangerous as they tunneled beneath the debris in search of the bodies of the victims. It is a memory that will remain always. The victims of this incident lay in one grave at Hither Green Cemetery.

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Another incident while I was on duty at night occurred when I saw an enemy bomber shot to pieces in the air by one of our night fighters. It fell in about half a dozen pieces in various streets. One member of the crew lived to walk away from the wreck. He was the tail end gunner, his section was shot away and fell in someone’s back garden and finished up ploughing through the garden fence. This survivor sure was a lucky man and he gave himself up at the Warden’s Post standing a few yards from where he fell.

During this period of the flying bomb, I saw one of these attacked over Chislehurst by one of our fighters. His attack was not successful. These things were really pilotless aeroplanes, and their speed was greater than our machines. If our pilot did not get it with the first burst of machine gun fire, his chance of success was gone. One felt reasonably safe all the time the jet engine was going, as soon as this cut out, it dived to earth with a terrific explosion which did great damage in the built up areas of Greater London.

The last air weapon that was used was the rocket, which no one knew was coming until it exploded on impact. These were much more powerful in their destruction and only the D-Day landing in France stopped these attacks. Their launching sites being quickly overrun by the Canadian forces. And so was brought to a close what seemed to be a perfect nightmare. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief at this period.
October 8\textsuperscript{th} 1961. Sunday.

Today I visited the scene of my war service, The Downham Estate.

The district is much as I knew it in the 1940 period. I also paid my respects to the fallen of the area who lie in Hither Green cemetery. These include the victims of the Sandhurst Road school bomb attack on which I and my comrades worked, and also four of my comrades of the Fire Service who were blown to pieces during an air raid. They all rest in a beautiful garden of remembrance and a lovely memorial records their names.

May they rest in peace.

God bless them all.

Two outstanding events for 1961

The Epsom Derby provided one of the finest finishes I have ever seen on a racecourse. The winner was Psidium, ridden by Poincelet.

The Soviet Trade Exhibition at Earls Court was the finest of its kind I have ever seen. During its 3 week run £18 million pounds worth of business was done and 600,000 people saw the exhibits. A super effort by any standard. Soviet craftsmen and their products are superb, and a wonderful eye opener to anyone who looks for quality in an article.
I would refer these few lines of mine to the attention of those unfortunate people, who through no fault of their own, are destined to lead lonely lives in strange places and among strange people, away from their “Home”.

When life seems dull and dreary
When you’re feeling rather blue
Just cast your eyes around you
Then wonder at the view
The hills, the fields, the woodlands
They’re here for your delight
The hedgerows gay with blossoms
All so colourful and so bright
With blackbirds singing happily
So high up out of sight
From morn till deepest night.

Composed by – E. Lawrance.

Being alone myself over a long period, I am very often asked by people the question, don’t you ever fell lonely?

My answer is this, if you live close to nature, you have peace of mind and enjoy life as it should be lived. You are content and covert nothing. It brings out the character to the full and the mind is master and can overcome any situations that may arise to try one, however personal.

In 1912 I remember seeing one of the earliest of our airships in flight during the army trials of that year. It was the one known as “Beta”, and was flown by naval personnel. Lt. Com. Martin Leake of High Cross was one of the officers concerned.
In the early 1900s prior to the first Great War, it was quite common for performing animals to be seen in the streets, and one of my very earliest memories of these happened when I was not more than 4 years old. I had not yet started school. It was a hue bear on a chain and I remember being held up to see it by my sister Maud. I remember I was rather afraid.

A rather eerie experience I had on one occasion was one very dark night. I had been across country to see some friends, and passing along by a dark wood, came face to face with a large brown owl sitting on a tree stump. His big eyes shone like torches and for a moment I was quite startled. I could not see his body. He remained there quite unafraid of me.

I have also on several occasions met foxes at very close quarters, and these have shown very little fear of me, and have just strolled past. Wild creatures can sense at once whether or not you will harm them, hence their unconcern, as on these encounters with me.

At a circus in 1933, I was strolling round and came upon a lion’s cage in which a couple were dancing. To prove that the animal was quite docile, any of the onlookers were invited to join them. I and about half a dozen others did so, and the animal remained quite passive. It looked normal in every way. I have wondered since if it had been doped for the occasion, The element of risk was always present anyway.
A very painful experience occurred to me some four years ago while trimming a hedge. At the base of an old tree stump, my blade struck a large wasp’s nest, cutting it in two. In an instant, I was attacked by the whole colony. They were all over me, in my hair and inside my clothing, much to my discomfort. I was about 100 yards from my bungalow, and I made a hasty retreat for cover pursued by the bees in “football jerseys”. I had completely disrobed to get rid of them, and received seventeen stings in the process. Luckily my bloodstream is not affected by wasp stings and I was left just a little stiff in the muscles for a couple of days or so.

On another occasion I received a hefty kick in the side from a horse, but just managed to avert the full force in my ribs by smartly slipping to the ground sideways. Had I not done so my ribs would have been smashed for certain. The after effects was severe stiffness for about a week. Believe me; they pack a terrific punch in their hooves when they hit you.

As a horse lover myself, I would like to place on record here that over 200,000 of these beautiful creatures were killed in the first World War, by the inhumanity of man. There is a memorial to them in North London. I believe it’s in Highgate (a very kindly thought).
As a person with a keen sense of humour, I always enjoy a good cartoon. The greatest of these I ever saw was by the celebrated Bruce Bainsfather. It depicted his famous Cockney pair of old sweats at the front during the 1914-18 war “Ole Bill & Bert”. A large unexploded shell lay just behind the trench with Bert astride this with hammer and chisel in hand, about to hit the nose cap. “Ole Bill” looking on stupidly and offering the advice of “Give it a good ‘ard ‘un Bert, yer can allus ‘ear ‘em a fizzin a bit when they are a goo-in ter explode”. This was surely the most side-splitting cartoon ever drawn.

“My Flight in an aeroplane”

In the summer of 1930, I flew over my native town of Hertford in an “Avro” biplane at a height of about 2,000 feet. It was a delightful experience, all the familiar places could easily be picked out with great clarity. It was an open cockpit machine, and what surprised me most was the fact that there was no sense of forward movement at all.

“My love of classical music and Concert Singers”

I have, in the past, much enjoyed the playing of Mark Hambourg, that maestro of the piano, and the singing of John McCormack, and Miss Kathleen Ferrier. What a beautiful voice she had. Their thousands of admirers regret the passing of these great artists of the concert platform.
The town of Ware, situated on the banks of the river Lee, about a mile from my birthplace, used, in the early part of the century, to present a wonderful sight with the great cowls of its many malting pointing skywards.

It was renowned as one of the greatest malting centres in the world in those days. Barges, of which there was a large fleet, used to carry the barley required for the trade down the river Lee to the many wharves on the riverside.

The crews of these craft, were a motley crowd, all attired in huge sweaters and peaked caps, and were renowned for their ability to take their “beer”. All were lovable characters. Alas, all have gone. The malting have nearly all disappeared. Of the very few remaining, the very large one of the firm of Croft, is still active.

Another trade for which the town was famous was brick-making. The Ware brick field was famous all over the country.

The great factory of Messes Allen and Hanbury Ltd. Whose products are known all over the world as “Allenbury’s” is also in Ware, as is the great brewery engineering firm of Messes Dennis Wickham and Company.

The Crofts and the Handburys are members of the great landed aristocracy who reside in the district and are highly respected by all.

The decline of the malting industry is due to the fact, as a “Cockney” would say it, “The beer ain’t wot it used ter be”. How right they would be.
The rainy weather we are having as I write these lines, has prompted me to compose these lines.

Oh, to be in England’
Now that autumn’s here,
It rains and rains,
Then rains again,
It bores us near to tears

Composed by – E. Lawrance.

I visit a very famous inn

During a visit to the city of St Albans some years ago, I dropped into what is reputed to be one of the oldest “Pubs” in the country. “The Fighting Cocks”. It was a quaint little place with very low ceilings, and in the bar parlour was a very large circular pit let into the floor. Here the birds used to do battle in the days when the sport of cock fighting was a legal pastime. For my own opinion on this subject I would say I am glad it is no longer permitted.

I am also interested in archaeology and I have seen interesting “Diggings” in various parts of the country. Old coins also attract me and I have quite a few of my own. And I have a great interest in good books, of which I have over 200 of my own. Ranging from such writers as Dickens, Tolstoy, Doughty, T. E. Lawrence, Churchill, Lloyd George, Sassoon, Dumas, Baroness Orczy, Kenneth Roberts and a host of other writers to numerous to mention here. I have been a book collector since the age of sixteen and am still carrying on with it now. This is a hobby I shall never give up.
Many people in this country think that the craft shot down at Cuffley, by Lt. W. Leefe Robinson V.C. was the first one destroyed in that campaign. It was not so, neither was it a Zeppelin, it was an airship of the Schutte-Lanz type, which was rather more than 400 feet in length and was of wooden framework internally.

The one shot down at Potters Bar by Lt Tempest, was a Zeppelin, about 600 feet in length and of latticed aluminium framework internally.

I inspected the wrecks of both of these airships. The latter I actually saw shot down, it was like a flaming torch. The crew met a terrible end, they were burnt to cinders, there being no parachutes in those days. The Commander, Kapitan Heinrich Mathy, leapt out of the burning craft and fell flat on his back. The impression of his head and shoulders made in the turf where he fell was over 1 foot deep. I saw this myself. This great officer had been in every raid on London.

The airship crews were brave men, I salute them. They did their duty for their country, as did our lads for England.

The first Zeppelin ever shot down, fell on a convent at Ghent in Belgium. Its destroyer, was Flight Lt. R.A.J. Warneford, of the Royal Naval Air Service. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

I am a keen student of aeronautics since the early days of flying and have many books on the subject. The Herr Kapitan Mathy, was still breathing when he was found, but died shortly afterwards.
During my many years in private service with the aristocracy, I spent two years in the employ of Sir Alfred Bower, at Manor Place, Chislehurst. The governor was an early pioneer of the motor car and had a Rolls Royce of early vintage jacked up in the garage in perfect condition.

Her Ladyship was a very fine artist and had a large collection of her own work. She was also a fine sculptress and a very beautiful figure of a woman in bronze stood outside the main entrance doors. She was a lady of great charm. Sir Alfred was a former Lord Mayor of London and held the French decoration of Chevalier de legion de Honneur. As a young man he was a great amateur cyclist, he told me himself.

Being myself a trained horticulturalist, I of course have paid many visits to the great Chelsea Flower Show. One of the greatest shows in the world.

I also attend the great shows at the Horticultural Hall at Westminster as they come around. The National Rose Show is an outstanding show.

There are two very keen desires of mine as yet unfulfilled, they are to attend the great military parade on the Horse Guards Parade, The Trooping of the Colour, and the other is to go down in a submarine. This latter wish of mine will perhaps elude me, but the former I shall eventually see, beyond doubt.

“Trips down London’s River, by Steamer up and down Steam.”

A very pleasant way to spend a few hours on a warm summers day, is to go aboard at Charing Cross for a trip through the “Poll of London” past the many wharves to Greenwich is very interesting. Likewise upstream to Kew, Richmond, Hampton Court, Teddington Lock and Kingston on Thames. The latter is a very enjoyable trip indeed.
Three Tragic Events before World War I

I have a very vivid recollection of the great liner Titanic disaster. This great ship struck an iceberg in the Atlantic, with heavy loss of life resulting. It had been considered unsinkable by its designers. The captain was warned of the proximity of a large ice-field in his path, but paid no attention to the warning, and in consequence stark tragedy resulted. The captain of the ship, Smith by name, true to the traditions of the sea went down with his ship.

The Second event was the Sidney Street Siege in London’s East End. A gang of desperate criminals were cornered in a house after murdering a policeman during a jewel robbery in Houndsditch. After a gun fight with troops of the Guards they set fire to the house rather than give themselves up and perished in the flames.

It was a gang led by one, Peter the Painter, who was known to the police, he escaped from the scene and was never traced. Although he was reported to have been seen many years later in Australia but was never caught.

The third event was the arrest of the murderer Dr. Crippen on the liner Montrose in mid-Atlantic by Inspector Dew of Scotland Yard. He was recognised by someone on board and a radio message was sent to the Yard, so ship was boarded in mid-ocean and he and his lady friend Ethel Le Neve, were arrested. She was disguised as a boy. Crippen was hanged and she let free.
Memories of an Important Election at Hertford 1916

At a time when the Royal Flying Corps was being badly shot about by the Bosch flying their new fighter aeroplane, known as the Fokker Monoplane, a very forceful figure in the person of an airman contested the Election at Hertford and won the seat from the Tory party. This was something which had never before happened in the constituency. He was Squadron Commander Pemberton-Billing of the Royal Naval Air Service.

When he arrived in Parliament, he informed the government in no uncertain manners that British flyers were being murdered, rather than killed at the Front, through being forced to fly obsolete aircraft.

The powers that be in Whitehall did not like this plain speaking, but it was very soon apparent that they took the hint and soon our lads obtained much better machines, and the Fokker of The Hun, was soon being itself roughly handled by the British airman. From that time, to the end of hostilities in 1918, the old Bosch was beaten at his own game.

Special note.

It was Squadron Commander Pemberton-Billing who organised the great bombing raid on the Zeppelin Sheds at Lake Constance, when much damage was done to that base. Three pilots, Briggs, Sippe and Babbington, all members of his squadron in the Naval Air Service made a very good job of the attack. The first mentioned was shot down and captured however.
Having seen the fighters of Biggin Hill flying into battle many times during the war, squadron after squadron, a truly wonderful sight, I herewith pay my tribute to those great pilots who came from all parts of the world to defend us.

“To the Royal Air Force”.
The boys they went a’winging,
To the azur skys above,
So young, so gay, so hearty,
To fight for those they loved,
With guns red hot and blazing,
They dived amongst their pray,
To the hated Hun they barred the way,
Much to the beasts dismay,
And when the smoke of battle cleared,
The folks below just cheered and cheered,
Great lads those boys in blue were,
When facing fearful odds,
For with guns red hot and blazing,
They smashed the Nazi thugs.

Composed by ~ Edward Lawrance.

I would like here also to pay tribute to the many Polish pilots who fought for us in the Battle of Britain, who were based at Northholt and other aerodromes. They were magnificent in battle and the Hun received no mercy at their hands. Yet their gallantry has never been properly recognised by us. The British are a most ungrateful race.
Note
The march past of the East Anglian Division consisted of 20,000 troops in close marching order.
Hertford gets second service man for its M.P.

On the retirement of Pemberton Billing from parliament, his successor was his former superior officer in the Naval Air Service. He was Rear Admiral Murray F. Sueter. This well known officer was the first commander of the Naval Air Service and was a typical sailor in his personal appearance with ruddy complexion and the walk of a seaman, and I guess with a stern outlook when it came to having his orders obeyed by his subordinates. He proved to be very popular in the new role of M.P.

In his earlier days in the Royal Navy, he was one of its first submarine enthusiasts, and during the first Great War also had something to do with the introduction of the “Tanks”, to be used on the Western Front by the British in an attempt to break up the trench warfare. This they failed to do however, although they did make things a little easier for the troops during attacks on Bosch positions. But this idea cut both ways, the Germans soon copied the idea with similar results, and trench warfare remained almost to the end. The same thing also happened when the poison gas was begun by the Bosch, he soon got similar treatment from us. It is this knowing of retaliation which will make certain in my opinion that the atomic and hydrogen bombs of the present day will never be used in war. Both sides know the fearful danger of using such weapons in battle.
The most famous commanding officer of the 1st Hertfordshire Regiment during World War 1, was a native of Ware. Lt. Col. Sir H. Page Croft, whose estate was “Farnhams Hall”, Ware. He was late Brigadier General Lord Croft. This officer was extremely popular with his men, and what a fine figure he was when in uniform. The family were highly thought of in the local society circles.

One of the most popular members of the original No. 1 company of the Herts Regt. He was a real stalwart of the Territorial movement from its earliest days, (he) was Company Sergeant Major R. J. Joyce of Bengeo, a man highly respected by all who knew him. He was on active service in France right through the 1914-18 period with the boys. As were Sergeants F. Kimmell, W. Kimmell, J. Ambrose and E. Purton, of my own personal schoolboy days. All were 3 or 4 years older than I. The latter was commissioned during the later part of the war in the Royal Air Force, and flew on anti-submarine patrol in airships. These were non rigid types and nicknamed “Blimps”, and the scene of their patrols was mostly in the Western Approaches. Irish Sea area.

The flying officer mentioned elsewhere in these notes, Capitan Brian Baker, is now an Air Marshal. He joined the old Royal Flying Corps soon after leaving Haileybury. I knew his family well. His people were brewers in Hertford. The commander of the airship shot down in Cuffley was Kapitan Wilhelm Schramm, all crew killed.
I visit a famous old church near Ware.

Just after the first war, I was strolling around the countryside, and in a lonely spot came upon a church composed of a bell tower only, the pews for the worshippers being arranged inside this. I have never seen another like it anywhere in the country. At the time of my visit, it was fast falling into decay; it was at the outskirts of the village of Thundridge.

At Hunsdon, there’s something of interest to students of aeronautics can be seen(exact place is Standon Green End), it is a monument marking the spot where the first balloon flight ever made in this country came down to land. The aeronaut who was responsible for this historic event was Vincent de Lunardi in 1784.

“Inn Signs” always draw my attention and the most interesting and picturesque one I have seen is at the village of Barley, Nr Royston. It shows The Fox and Hounds in full cry, and stretches from one side of the street to the other.

Express engines on the railways have always given me a thrill and still do so. I have often stood on the bridge at Hatfield and seen them come through at speed, you can see the rails move up and down as they approach you head on.

I have also stood beside the famous Welwyn Viaduct with its forty arches when the famous Great Northern express “The Flying Scotsman” has come thundering overhead. The lure of speed always has had a strong hold over me. Hence my great interest in flying and motor racing.
Some years ago while on a visit to Windsor Castle, I went into Saint George’s Chapel. This is extremely beautiful inside. The carving is superb. Here to be seen are the pews of “The Knights of the Garter”, each one with its standard overhead and its name plate affixed on each seat.

The many tombs of British Royalty are all here too from hundreds of years back to the present day. It is a place that should certainly be seen by anyone who happens to be in Windsor and doing the rounds of interesting places in the district.

The Crypt of St. Pauls, I have also been through, here many famous people, Lord Nelson and many others are interred down here.

I have also been up in the “Whispering Gallery” in the dome of this cathedral, and it is a fact that if one puts one’s lips to the wall and speaks in a very low voice, you can converse quite easily with a person on the other side of the dome, and it’s a very great expanse when you are up there, the sound waves travel round.

The Church and Crypt of St. Martins in the Fields, is also worth a visit. In the crypt here, the down and outs of London are given shelter, and there is an alter down there that commemorates the very famous vicar of the church, The Rev: Dick Shepherd, one of the finest preachers I have ever heard. It was he who had the place fitted out for the unfortunates. It’s nice to think he is permanently remembered in the place where he did such fine work.
“Tragedy at Hendon Aerodrome Display”

During my annual visit to “The Royal Air Force Display” in the early 1930s, I witnessed the fatal accident to the son of the Lord Mayor of London, that same year, Squadron Leader Collett; whose father was Sir Chas: Collett. His officer had just left the aerodrome in formation with his squadron of “Hawker Harts”, when his machine developed a defect. It turned round to land, but side-slipped and crashed with a fearful thud. After a few seconds it burst into flames with the officer trapped in the cockpit. He was burnt to a cinder poor fellow, right before my eyes. The other occupant jumped out just before it went up in flames, he was unhurt. By a strange stroke of fate I came to know the dead man’s brother quite well many years later, he was married to the daughter of my governor at “Englefield”, Bickley, my last place before coming here to Keston. I was there eight years.

As is customary in the Royal Air Force the show carried on as if nothing had occurred. Whenever a flyer crashes, if he is unhurt, he immediately goes up again in another plane in order that he does not lose his nerve. Otherwise he would brood over it and go to pieces, and most likely never fly again.

Use of Hendon for the big R.A.F. shows have been discontinued for some years now and always take place here at Biggin Hill, which is about two miles from Keston.
The German Secret Agents in England before the First World War were in all manner of occupations in military centres. Hertford being no exception. For about 2 years prior to the war numerous Germans settled in the town and went out of their way to come into contact with officers and N.C.O.s from the barracks. Two were barbers in the Ware Road, their saloon was behind the paper shop next to Wren’s Bakery and this place was always frequented by the troops being so close to the barracks. Whether they ever learned anything from them of course is purely guessing. But one fact which struck me very much was that they suddenly left the place without telling their customers, 2 or 3 days before we declared war.

The two managers at the Gramophone Works in Mead Lane also disappeared at the same time, both these were Germans, and the works was a German firm, Fonotipia Ltd. Two other brothers in the town, Kiang by name, also hopped off in a hurry as well. One owned a cake shop in Fore Street and the other a milk business.

German bands also frequented the district, and at Library Hall, near Ware, there was a large colony of Germans who posed as naturalists and could often be seen on the meads in summer time with butterfly nets, cameras and other paraphernalia. I knew some of these by sight and have seen them hanging around the Hertford Barracks from time to time. All these vanished like the others.
The two following occurred many years apart and concern a swan and two dogs.

One of my favourite pastimes being rowing, I was out one evening on the River Lee at the small village of Broxbourne in Hertfordshire. In the reeds around a sharp bend in the stream and quite unknown to me was a swans nest with a batch of young cygnets in it. As I approached the male bird left his mate and flying straight at me with neck outstretched and hissing with fury, he savagely attacked my boat, beating it with his huge wings. Had I not beaten him back with an oar, I might well have been severely injured those birds being very strong. He persisted in the attack for about ten minutes, he then left me.

“A lonely grave in Box Hill”
Near the top of Box Hill, Dorking is the grave of a local eccentric resident who directed that he be buried head downwards. His wish was duly carried out and a stone erected.

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The affair concerning the two dogs was one of rescue. They had fallen over the edge of a chalk quarry, and were helpless on a ledge, with a sheer drop of about thirty feet below them. I crawled very carefully down a very steep slope and was able to grab them each by the collar slowly working my way to the top. Had I slipped we should have had a serious fall and have broken bones, however all went well for us luckily. I was a lad of 12 years of age at the time. The two dogs belonged to the famous authoress Florence Barclay.

“Hidden beauty on riverbed”
In the river Lee near the old mill below Ware Park, there is a wonderful bed of water lilies about 200 yards in extent. On a bright sunny day the water at this spot is crystal clear and I drifted over them in a boat and gazed in wonder at their glorious display of colours. From the towpath they cannot be seen, you must pass right above them.
The South Pole reached for the first time

I well remember this great feat of endurance achieved by the Norwegian exploration party on Dec: 14th 1911 led by Captain Roald Amundsen. Five weeks or so after, the ill-fated British party led by Captain Scott also reached the same point and found they had been beaten in the race. On the return journey to base they were overwhelmed in a blizzard and all died. Years after, Captain Amundsen lost his life while flying in North Polar regions.

Note
Captain Scott was the father of Peter Scott the well known wild fowl expert, so well known nowadays.

June 6th 1962

Today I witnessed most sensational race for the Epsom Derby. 7 horses fell near Tattenham Corner including the favourite Hethersett. One horse broke a leg and was destroyed on the spot. It was King Canute II. The ultimate winner was the Irish horse Larkspur with French horses Arcor and Le Cantilien second and third. The greatest thrill for me was to see the French horse Crossen (riderless) coming along near the finishing post almost dead in line with his two team mates who were second and third. How these animals enjoy racing was plain to see. All the other fallen horses picked themselves up and ran the last half mile to the finish in a group, a wonderful sight. Had a most interesting companion all the afternoon, a gentleman from Louisville Kentucky, who complimented me on my knowledge of race horses. He informed me that his brother was a trainer in U.S.A. I felt very flattered on learning that I must say!
Hertfordshire’s Royal Citizen

Her Majesty Elizabeth The Queen Mother belongs to my county being born at St. Paul’s Waldenbury Nr. Hitchin. The seat in England of her parents The Earl and Countess of Strathmore. Albert Duke of York courted her on this estate and spent much of his time (there). Her Majesty was then known of course by her family name she was – The Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon. I think one of her family still lived on another estate close by Kings Waldenbury Nr. Hitchin. The Strathmore Estate in Scotland is Glamis Castle.

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Memories of a very severe winter.

In 1916 we had the most savage blizzard I can recall to mind. In those days all the telephone lines were carried from town to town on poles across country. Some of these carried upwards of about 40 lines. The heavy snowfall brought many of these down. The army was called in to put them up again and I remember very vividly the lads were waist deep in snow when doing this job. They kept in good spirits by singing this ditty made up for the occasion, it was as follows.

For one and a penny a day.
Yes one and a penny a day.
We are digging great holes,
And putting up poles.
For one and a penny a day.

The Sappers of the Royal Engineers received this princely-sum in those days.
The 3 finest and kindest people it has been my good fortune to have known in person were Mrs Baldock and Mrs Knight, both of Ware, and Miss Godfrey of London Colney.

The two first mentioned were mothers of large families and were always ready to help anyone in time of need, and were sadly missed by many people whom they befriended when they passed on. God bless them both.

The last lady mentioned was a real fairy god mother to a young Canadian soldier I knew during the 1914-18 war.

These grand people are often in my thoughts all these years after, and I think of the people of today and their complete and utter disregard of anyone but themselves. How the world has changed since World War 1, in a retrograde way. To people of my generation it’s tragic.

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**Military Events at Hertford 1917-18**

With the army reaching its maximum peak in manpower it became imperative that sufficient N.C.O.s be trained to handle them on active service. So it came about that the School of Instruction was formed at the barracks of the Herts Militia in the town. Bayonet fighting and the use of the machine gun were high on the list of activities. The officer in command of the school was Lt. Colonel Sir H. Delves-Broughton and the adjutant was Capt. Massey-Beresford aided by Lieut. Blackburn-Mays. A famous boxing champion was also on the staff, Sergeant Pat Q’Keefe the British middle-weight champion at that time, and another outstanding army boxer sergeant Zimmer, who was very well known in amateur pugilism.

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Memories of a Pageant in Hertford

Just prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 the borough of Hertford staged a pageant of its history from the earliest times. It was all done in costumes through the ages and was extremely interesting to look upon. The whole affair was marshalled in the square of Christ’s Hospital and then wound its way through the town amid streets lined with the populace.

About this time also the town was presented with its just motor fire engine a “Merryweather” a machine of high class. It was the gift of Sir Edward Pearson of Brickendon Bury Park a member of the local aristocracy in the district, and was a great advance on the old horse drawn steam engine formerly used.

“Memories of my old school”

I was educated at the Cowper Testimonial School in London Road, Hertford. Our headmaster was Mr. J. R. Strubell a very popular tutor and known over a very wide area of East Herts. Some of our pupils used to cycle upwards of 8 to 10 miles night and morning (no bus then). One of the things I well remember was the wonderful Lantern Lectures we used to enjoy, the pictures were “stills” of course but beautifully coloured. The head was a great one for visual education and wonderful views of Canada, Egypt and places like that he would show us, accompanied by his fine running commentary. I regret to say the art master Mr Powell, and the master of the fourth form Mr Cawley were killed in the First World War.
The school being opposite the military barracks of the Herts Militia – August 4th 1914 was an unforgettable day as all the Reserve Troops from all over the county reported for duty, it was a sight I shall never forget. I knew all the Staff Sergeants at the barracks as their boys were all school friends of mine. I would like to record all their names here. They were Sergeants Woods, Cannon, Morris, Norman, Nash, Buckle and Hiram Hammond. The latter was unfortunately killed in action while, while Cannon attained the rank of Captain, and lastly Sergeant Deller who was after his retirement, Markey Beadle of Hertford.

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“Memories of a great man”

When I was about eight years old I have a vivid recollection of seeing General Booth founder of The Salvation Army.

He was driven past my house in a car which was an event in itself. Cars being scarcely seen in those days.

He was in my opinion one of the really great benefactors of mankind and his great organisation has done more good in this world than all the rest put together.

The most overrated man of all time was Winston S. Churchill who was in my opinion just a fellow with the gift of the gab, in other words a loud mouthed fellow who was well paid for his job. The real heroes of Britain was every Tom, Dick or Harry who got no thanks for doing their duty.

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Memories of the Fire Brigade 1914

The Hertford Fire Brigade station was at the time situated in the lane leading to the Diker Oil Cake Mill. The engine was of course a steamer and horse drawn.

I well remember the horses harness was all hung overhead and was dropped on to the horses backs as soon as the alarm came through.

The boiler of the appliance was lighted and stoked as soon as it moved off, and by the time the scene of the fire was reached there was a good pressure of steam for the pump. The brigade were all volunteers, no N.F.S. in those days.

Today I discovered the remains of the proceeds of a robbery at “The Fox Hotel” Keston. 2 large cash registers with all drawers forced open, but containing large amount of coppers still intact. All notes and silver removed by thieves. Also found carpenters “bit”, used to force door of premises, about £100 worth of cigarettes also taken from bar of premises.

Landlord of pub: informed by me.
Two interesting experiences while attached to the London Fire Brigade during the 39-45 war.

On one occasion I was hoisted to (the) top of 100ft extension ladder over the top of Avery Hill College attached by hook belt, an interesting experience.

On another occasion I had to leap from a second floor window into a sheet held below for me by my comrades.

A very narrow escape, 1941

During a very heavy night raid by the Luftwaffe on London, I had just left my post of duty when a large piece of anti-aircraft shell crashed through the glass roof and fell to the floor where I had been standing a moment before, it could not have missed me. My luck was with me that night. It was the closest call I ever had. The hate Bosche killed two of my brothers in the 14-18 war but he failed to complete the hat trick.

The truth of an old saying.

I was in the office of Messes Gilbertson and Page Ltd of Hertford during the First Word War, when a large portrait of one of the directors fell to the floor and was smashed to pieces. The man in the portrait was Lt. Col: Frank Page of the Herts Regt. And he was killed in action on the day the portrait fell to the floor.

When a picture falls to the floor it is supposed to be the sign of death of someone closely connected.
Free Ballooning days

A very common sight in this county prior to the 1914 war was the round balloon. I have seen as many as 6 in the air at one time, and I helped pull one to earth by its drag rope anchor. This event took place at Kings Meads near the railway level crossing. I afterwards helped the aeronaut to fold up and pack the gasbag and it was then taken to the railway station.

During the earlier part of that war the old Royal Flying Corps used the balloons to teach young officers navigation.

“Flight by large airships between the two wars”.

I saw the flight of the large British airships R29 and R101. The first mentioned I saw in flight over Hertford Heath she was flying very low at the time, truly a wonderful sight. The latter I saw at Hendon, not long before she was wrecked in France. Airships were abandoned after this crash at Beauvais.
My experiences in many directions have given me a very broad outlook on life, and is something I have enjoyed very much, and has brought me in personal contact with many very interesting people in all walks of life. I feel intensely sorry for all those people who have never left their own back yard. They have entirely missed the worthwhile things in life which they were meant to enjoy during their stay on this earth, they cannot enjoy the greatest of all pleasures by that, I mean interesting conversation. This is something I would not like to have missed for all the gold in the bank.

Life for me from now on, will be a similar repetition of my life as given in this story of my past years; at least that is my very sincere hope for the coming years.

Coach tours to beauty spots I love.
Trips to London with all it offers.
The Derby at Epsom each year etc.
I intend to enjoy my life to the full always. I love life and all I get out of it, Finally my thoughts are ever in my childhood home in the valley of the River Lee, near Chadwell Spring.

I have very much enjoyed writing my recollections, and my thanks go to the lady who did the line etching of me inside this book. The first time I met her, she said to me, I feel sure you could write an interesting story Mr. Lawrance, at least that is my opinion. Will you do it? I said I would, Hence the story.....................