

THE TIME OF OUR LIVES



**MEMORIES OF LEISURE
IN THE 1920S AND 1930S**

AN AGE EXCHANGE PUBLICATION

THE TIME OF OUR LIVES

MEMORIES OF LEISURE IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

Edited by Pam Schweitzer

Photography by Alex Schweitzer

Layout and design by Pam and Alex Schweitzer

"THE TIME OF OUR LIVES" was published by Age Exchange to coincide with their theatre production of the same name, based on the recollections in this book.

A Look Back at Our Leisure Hours

The Great Outdoors

Live Entertainment

The Cinema

The Dancing Years

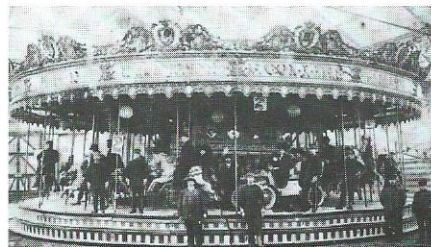
Courting Days

Outings

Holidays

Hop-Picking

An Overview



Grateful thanks to all the contributors for giving us their time and the benefit of their experience.

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Introduction

'The Time Of Our Lives' is a compilation of stories told to us by pensioners in the London area about their recollections of leisure time in the 1920s and 30s. Together they provide a lively and often amusing view of what it was like to be a teenager fifty and more years ago, in the days before television. The most commonly used phrase was, 'we made our own entertainment', and the book gives a very clear picture of what this entailed.

Many of these stories were recorded on tape in reminiscence sessions. Others are written contributions which come from members of Age Exchange's reminiscence groups, or from individual pensioners with whom we keep in contact through correspondence.

Almost all the photographs in this book were also donated to us by the storytellers. We wish to thank all those who have given so generously of their time to create this project, and do hope they are pleased with the result. We believe it will be of considerable interest to younger readers and will evoke many happy memories amongst older readers.

Pam Schweitzer, Editor

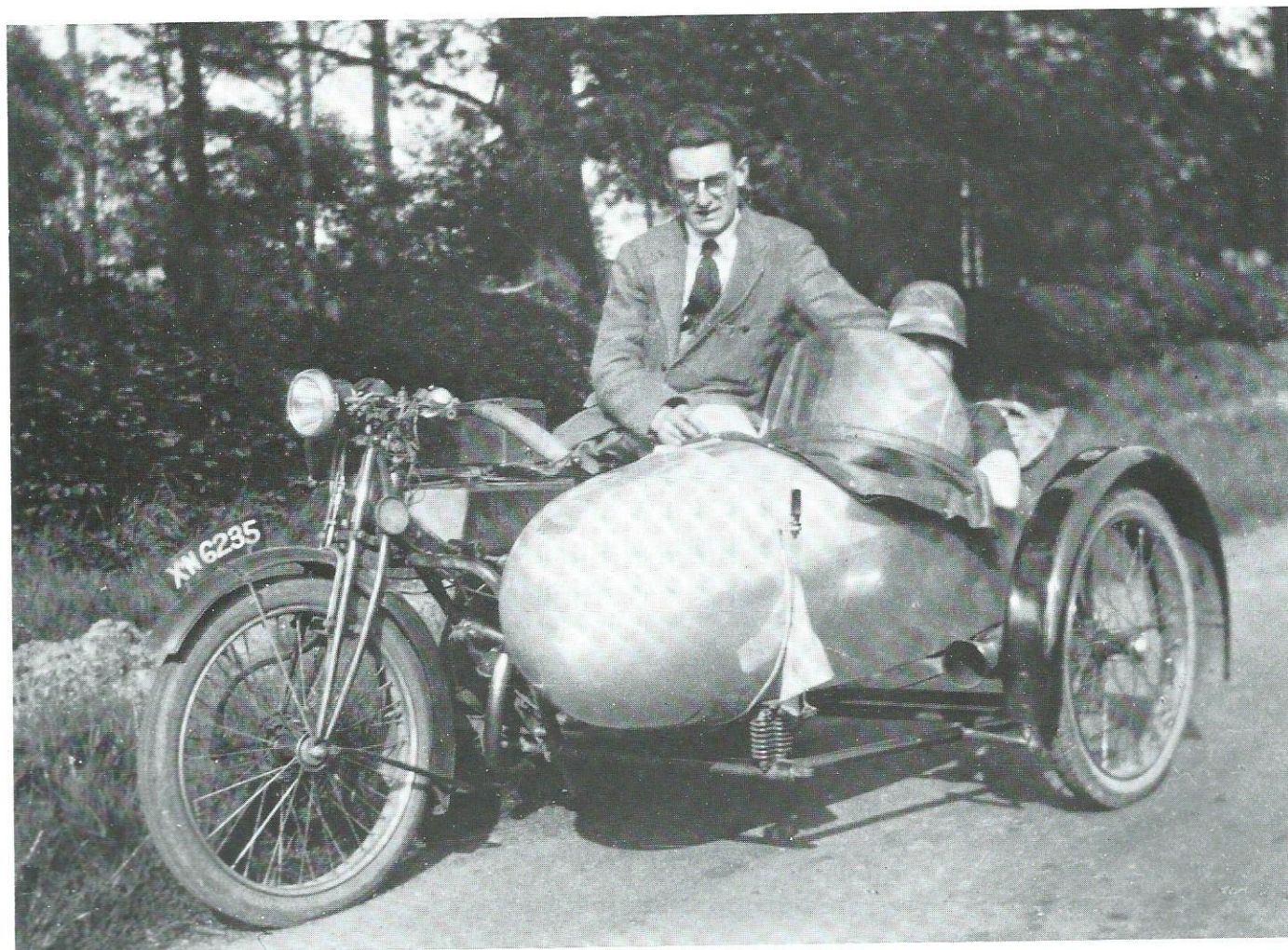
Editor's Note:

This is the 2nd impression of 'The Time Of Our Lives'. We are reprinting it to coincide with a revival of our popular touring theatre show of the same name which is based on these stories.

Since 1986, when the first edition was published, Age Exchange Theatre has expanded its activities considerably. We have opened Britain's first Reminiscence Centre in London which houses a permanent collection of reminiscence items and a changing programme of 3-dimensional exhibitions relating to reminiscence themes. It is also a meeting place for professionals from the fields of health and social services who wish to develop their skills in using reminiscence with groups of older people.

To celebrate the relaunching of this book, we shall be creating an exhibition in the Reminiscence Centre about the sea-side in the 1920s and '30s which will be visited by thousands of people. As well as enjoying the sights and sounds of that era, they will be invited to recall their own memories of day trips and holidays in their younger days so that these can be recorded for the future.

For help, advice and the use of their photographic archives, Age Exchange wish to thank the staff at:
Woodlands Local History Library, Greenwich.
Manor House Local History Library, Lewisham.
Southwark Local History Library.



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A Look Back at Our Leisure Hours

The leisure activities of teenagers (a word unknown then) in the 30s were very innocuous and, probably, to today's youngsters would appear to be boring. I was a Girl Guide Ranger and the Company to which I belonged was attached to the Wesleyan Chapel in William Street, Woolwich. It is now a Sikh Temple, and the street renamed Calderwood Street. I can remember the Chapel holding a bazaar twice a year, in aid of Overseas Missions. One around Easter time, and the other in the autumn. One of the members of the Chapel was a head of a highly reputable local firm of builders and decorators, and he took over the job of converting the Chapel hall into individual stalls, which the different sections of the Chapel then took over and decorated. The Easter bazaar had a Spring motif, and the one later in the year an autumnal theme. The final effect seemed to me so pretty and gay, and I used to marvel to myself at the transformation of this ordinary, plain, utilitarian hall into separate flowery bowers. The Girl Guides had the sweet stall, and we trotted round to a wholesaler in Wellington Street to collect the boxes of sweets we were to sell. I always enjoyed the bazaars, and not only because of the sweets. We didn't eat many!

We then gave the occasional concert. When this happened I managed to be one of the behind-the-scenes staff. If I did have to appear on stage, I made sure I was one of the back row of the chorus.

Once, I went with them camping at Downe in Kent, where we visited Charles Darwin's house. I only went

camping the one time. It rained, and was too uncomfortable and I didn't enjoy roughing it. We went for rambles in Kent. If we got only as far as Chislehurst we thought we were in the heart of the country.

I had a bike (second-hand), and with two friends cycled out, again into Kent. The summer evenings then seemed to stay lighter longer than now, and there was nothing to be afraid of.

Of course, television wasn't even thought of, but the wireless was getting into its stride and competing with the gramophone as home entertainment. Then there were the "pictures". After a slow start, I became a real film fan, going practically every week, sometimes even twice — Jeanette Macdonald and Nelson Eddy; Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Ah me! Happy Days!. I lapped up the Hollywood musicals. Even now, give me half a chance, and I'll watch Fred Astaire for hours. I thought then, and still do, he was the most elegant entertainer of this century.

Books were another source of amusement. I was a frequent visitor to the local library in William Street (now Calderwood Street). I had a pretty catholic taste — anything from Dickens, P. G. Wodehouse and Daphne du Maurier.

Sport wasn't of much interest to me. I wasn't good at it. I did enjoy swimming though, and went often to the local baths in Market Place (now Bathway).

It all seems a million years away now.

There were several things I enjoyed doing when I first started working. There was a group of us the same age in the office and every week we went to the Pleasance at Eltham to play tennis. We always wore immaculate "whites" and walked to the courts feeling like the "cat's whiskers"! We weren't very professional but made up for that with enthusiasm — diving around the court to make it look good — as there was always an audience around the area.

I also belonged to a rambling club which went out on Sundays, into Kent. The journey started on the train and in those days, people dressed in their "best" on Sundays, so the boys would start with long trousers over their shorts. The trousers were discarded on the train and several times other travellers were horrified when some of our boys would suddenly announce, "Well, I think I'll take my trousers off now." On another occasion I remember, having walked seventeen miles we were ambling through a field which ran beside the railway when we heard a train behind us. Our leader said, "That's our train", and we all broke into a mad gallop — needless to say we missed it.

I belonged with my sister, to the girls club attached to the Royal Garrison Church. The deaconess ran this and we met on Friday evenings. Sometimes there were debates, spelling bees, beetle drives and keep-fit. We also invited the troops to social evenings and dances and my feet have never been the same since being walked all over by army boots! All this ended abruptly when the church was bombed.

We then decided to "do our bit" and went to the YMCA who had opened a club for soldiers in Woolwich. There we dispensed gallons of tea and mounds of sandwiches, very tiring after a day's work, but good fun all the same.

I was also fond of going to the cinema where we got two decent films and a newsreel for our money.

On the evenings I stayed at home I've always been an avid reader and belonged to the Foyle's Book Club from whom we got a book a month for 2/6. I was also a prolific knitter and used to design my own fair isle patterns.

Marjorie Smith



WHAT'S ON IN LONDON

Journeys from Lewisham (Clock Tower)

BANDS IN THE PARKS

Hyde Park daily, 3.0 to 5.0 and 7.0 (Sundays, 7.30) to 9.30.
Green Park on Sundays, 5.30 to 7.30.

By Bus routes 36, 136 to Hyde Park Corner.
Journey time 42 mins.

Fare Ordinary 6d. Single
10d. Return
Cheap Mid-day 3d. Single

EXHIBITION

Air Post Exhibition at Horticultural Hall next week. On Monday, 12 noon to 8 p.m.; Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

By Tram route 54 or Bus routes 36, 136 to Rochester Row.
Journey time 33 mins.

Fare Ordinary 3d. Single
8d. Return
Cheap Mid-day 2d. Single

RUGBY

League Final at Wembley Stadium on Saturday, 5th May, 3.0 p.m.
By Bus routes 20, 21 or Tram routes 46, 52 to Upper Grange Road (Old Kent Road), change to Bus routes 48, 53, 63, 153.
Or Tram routes 36, 38, 74 for Elephant & Castle, change to Underground for Wembley.
Journey time 70 mins.

Fare 1/4 Single
2/7 Return

The period between leaving school at 14 years and the commencement of war (1936-1939) my leisure time was spent in activities at the local chapel, such as Christian Endeavour, Bible Class and Band of Hope. Friends were made there and we extended our activities to take rambles through Kent, Eynesford, Shoreham, Toys Hill and Ide Hill. We also arranged special birthday parties using the chapel hall, and the girls were enlisted to organise the catering.

As we got older we started pairing off with the boys, and mostly went out in a foursome, occasionally going to the pictures or out for a meal.

As my older brother attended these activities as well, he went out with my girl friends, and I, in turn, went out with his boy friends. They nearly all worked at the Woolwich Arsenal so knew each other at work.

I also went to Evening Classes for various subjects.

I spent some weekends at the home of my girl friend. She was an only child so my company was greatly valued, although, I might add, I had to "give way" a lot when it came to planning our outings, as she had been used to having her own way in everything.

In later years I joined a swimming club and went twice a week in the evenings.

I also went to classes to learn to dance with my brother.

Occasionally we went to Dances, Old-Time and Modern.

Joan Welch

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| <p>LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL</p> <p>A GOOD INVESTMENT</p> <p>EVENING CLASSES</p> <p>OPENING DATE, 17th SEPT., 1934</p> <p>COMMERCIAL - TECHNICAL - ART LITERARY AND HOME SUBJECTS MODERN LANGUAGES</p> <p>SEPARATE CLASSES FOR ADULTS AND JUNIORS</p> <p>LOW FEES</p> | |
| <p>IF YOU DESIRE PARTICULARS</p> <p>please cut out, fill in and return the accompanying slip.</p> | <p>TO EDUCATION OFFICER (7b), THE COUNTY HALL, S.E.1.</p> <p>Please send information in accordance with the following particulars:</p> <p>1. Subject or Subjects of instruction required _____</p> <p>2. District preferred _____</p> <p>3. Whether over or under 17 years of age _____</p> <p>4. Name _____ No. _____ Address _____</p> |

I left school at the age of fourteen, I liked school very much and was sorry to leave. My friend at that time was a girl named Elizabeth Carter. She was rather pretty with nice curly hair, I was quite ordinary looking with long ginger hair, and until I left school it was plaited and rolled up on top of my head. I didn't like this style very much, the other girls would call me carrots.

After leaving school I went to live with my father in Old Woolwich Road. As he lived alone I couldn't get a job, I had to stay at home to look after him and the house. As he worked in shifts, away for twenty-four hours at times, the cleaning and shopping did not take long as there was only two of us. I did a lot of reading, and walking in the park. I lost touch with Elizabeth as her family were poor so she had to find a job right away. At that time most of my social life emanated from the church, in which I took an active part. I made friends by joining the tennis club which was held in the grounds of Maitland House in Greenwich High Road. It was a very nice house with lots of space inside and out. Four of us would go about together, Reg, Les, and Jenny. Les and Reg were older than Jenny and I. Reg played the drums in a small band, and played at the church socials and dances. Jenny was then my best friend, we were very fond of dancing and most Saturday evenings went dancing at Greenwich Baths. We always managed to get a partner or two. When my father was on the night shift Jenny would stay with me, and my friends would come round in winter evenings, read, listen to the wireless, sometimes Reg would bring his drums and would practice very quietly. Every Sunday morning I had to visit my grandmother, she was old but very agile. She made Ginger Wine which she insisted I drank. It was so hot it burnt your throat but I dare not refuse.

When the four of us went out together we met at a little sweet shop on Blackheath Hill, a Mr Bennett owned the shop, he was a very kind man, in winter he would

make us hot black-current drinks to warm us up. We then discussed plans for the coming week. If there was a jumble sale or sale of work at the church, us girls would make pin cushions, handkerchiefs and tray cloths to sell. We also belonged to the Primrose League which was a young people's club held in a small hall in South Street Greenwich. It was nice there, we played table tennis, dancing and many other games and mixed with more young people. We all wore the Primrose Badge and were very proud of it. We also went on day trips arranged by the club. I remember going to Cheddar Caves. We had a great time.

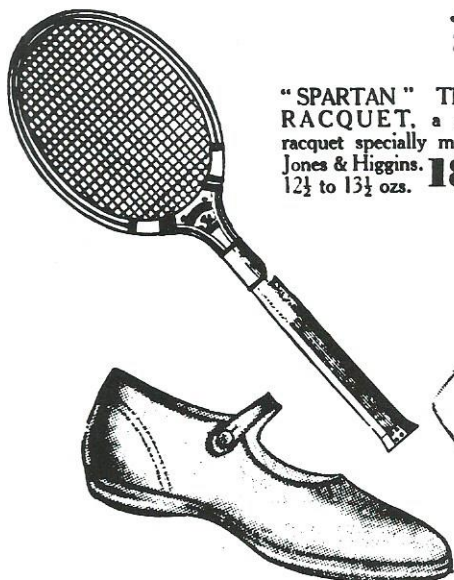
Jenny and I wore berets in those days and a matching silk scarf tied in a large bow showing outside our coats. This was considered very smart. In summer playing tennis two or three evenings a week was very enjoyable. My friends and I spent a lot of time in Greenwich Park feeding the ducks or the deer or talking to a friendly park keeper, and some days they would be going round on horses.

Later in the year there was Harvest Festival to look forward to. We all sang in the church choir, and after practice we helped decorate the church. The boys doing the hardest jobs. After the service the harvest supper was held in the church hall. Two long tables laid out with lots of food. After the eats the tables were cleared and dancing began and a good selection of talent was seen.

In summer there were garden parties held in the grounds of Trinity College. We all had a stall to look after, lots of people came to these events, the big attraction were the mulberry trees, we would pick the mulberries from the trees and serve with fresh cream. This stall did very well. In the evening it was dancing on the lawns till dark.

Some time after, my father got a woman in to look after the house, and I got my first job which was at Siemans of Woolwich. I didn't care for this work, it was

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