

# Welcome to Memories on a Monday: Milk and Bottle Tops – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

## Monday 30 March 2020

Welcome to Memories on a Monday: Milk and Bottle Tops – where we are sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum and Archive.

Right now we are very reliant on food deliveries to and from our shops and direct to our homes wherever possible. If, like me, you have a milkman, hearing the clinking of bottles arriving on your doorstep is a very reassuring sound. The milkman has been making a comeback in recent years as we wage the ‘war on plastic’, with more milk being delivered in glass bottles nowadays, straight to our homes. If you don’t have a milkman and this brings back some nostalgic feelings, then here’s a chance to take a journey down memory lane as well as giving a thought to our amazing keyworkers helping us by delivering milk today.



Milk delivery up Jolly Butchers Hill, Wood Green in 2002.

From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive - © Henry Jacobs, photographer

### Before Glass Milk Bottles



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View of trees with cows at Downhills in Tottenham, painted in 1884 by Harold Lawes. This view looks across the once rural landscape and fields with its lush pasture near Broadwaters, which benefitted from the waters of the nearby river Moselle. Today this open space is part of Lordship Recreation Ground by Broadwater Farm estate, and Downhills Park.

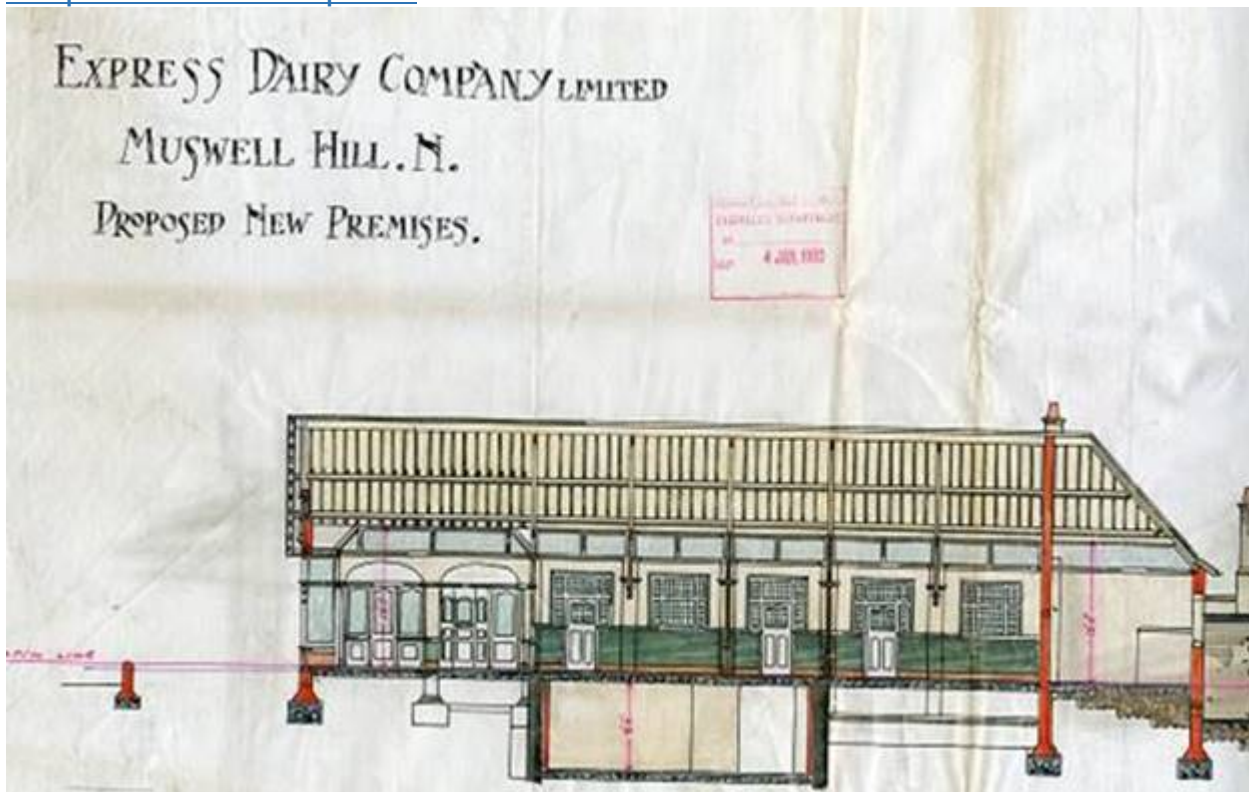
Although perhaps hard to imagine now, for centuries Haringey was open countryside and farms with pasture for dairy cows. There were still a few working farms up until the 1930s, with some locals remembering livestock being driven along roads. Keeping cows at local dairy farms was essential for providing milk for communities, especially at a time when households did not have electricity - and of course refrigerators.



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Highgate milkmen preparing for their rounds from Manor Farm in 1890.

As dairy farms began to become more commercial, then milk deliveries would travel around the neighbourhood in either horse-drawn or even hand-pushed carts, bringing fresh milk door to door with a metal churn or barrel full of milk. Households would come out and bring whatever containers they had - jugs, pails or jars - and the milkman or his young helper would fill it up with fresh milk. Measures were of course taken in imperial units - not metric - [of pints, half pints or quarts and half quarts.](#)



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With increasing urbanisation, so more and more dairies were set up all around the borough. This building plan for new premises for the Express Dairy dates from around 1900. The building still survives today at the top of Muswell Hill, near to the Roundabout.



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

This dairy once stood opposite Bruce Castle from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The shop assistants peer through the shop window over eggs and other goods stocked high.

When pupils come to Bruce Castle today on school visits, they get a chance during our educational workshops to think about what life was like without the convenience of getting everything in a supermarket and living without electricity.

They get hands-on with original Victorian and Edwardian objects, dress up and 'have-a-guess' at what the 'mystery objects' below might have been used for, looking for clues.

© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



Here are a few photographs of milkmen from around the borough:



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William Edward Gardner and his milk delivery boy standing proud by their milk cart in West Beech Road, Wood Green, c.1905. They would have undertaken deliveries up to three times a day.



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Milk being delivered from W. Oakman of Kings Road, Tottenham, c.1900.



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Loading milkcarts outside Broadwaters Farm, Tottenham, in about 1910. Broadwaters was a working farm until 1916.

Deliveries of milk did not change much for decades. One local Maisie Wright (b. 1929) was interviewed in 2006 by Hazel Whitehouse of Bruce Castle Museum, looking back at Stevens the Dairy, Jansons Road, Tottenham, giving an insight of how these little dairies went about their business:

*“Next door to us, the other cottage was a dairy when I was a child. The shop front was in Jansons Road. Stevens the Dairy. They had the yard where the car-wash is now. That’s where they kept the hand cart for the milk round. Right up to the War he did the round, he had a small round, he had the measures and he used to fill people’s jugs. We had the Co-Op milk. But Stevens Dairy, they had big churns, don’t know where they got the milk. Mum used to send me round with a jug if we ran out. They didn’t have bottling facilities there, just the churns. Can’t remember if they did butter or cream. I can remember there was a big copper and if it was summer and they thought it might go off, they’d boil it in the copper. I actually saw that.*

*It was a very small shop, and there was a door leading into the far room which was their living-room. Don’t remember tiled walls. There was a counter at the side, might have had a marble top. Some churns were out in the yard, but I don’t remember if they had any in the shop or where they were kept. I was only a child then, and I’d only go there if we’d run out. I’m not sure if they had a cash register, I think they had a drawer for the money, I’m pretty sure. They had metal dippers*

*to measure out the milk. No special sort of milk, just milk. She was 'Auntie Annie' to me, they were related to my father's first wife in some way. They had a small milk round; people left their jugs out on the steps."*

## All Change with Glass Milk Bottles

With the invention of glass milk bottles, this changed the dairy delivery scene. Having a daily milk delivery would ensure that milk would not spoil before people could drink it. But having glass bottles made it far easier. Perhaps you might remember the little cardboard tops decorated with advertising or messages that kept the milk covered? These were replaced post-WW2 to foil tops, as it was more hygienic.



© Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

Here, Harry Carter stands next to his horse Sampson and delivery cart in Victoria Road, Wood Green, c.1932. Harry made two deliveries a day – even on Christmas Day – one for fresh milk and the second for fruit and vegetables. Harry moved to London from Ireland and worked for United Dairies from 1925 to 1962, receiving many medals for good service. He was the last milkman in Wood Green to continue to use a horse. His granddaughter recalls he was devastated when his last horse was taken away while he was on holiday. The United Dairies depot was then in Station Road in Wood Green, built on the premises that used to belong to Abbott Brothers dairy farmers.



From the collections of Bruce Castle Museum & Archive - © Henry Jacobs, photographer

Local photographer Henry Jacobs took these photos during the 1970s and fondly remembers: "*Ernie Phillips had his shop in Thackery Road (corner of Windsor*



Road) in Tottenham. Ernie had an electric milk float and was a very familiar figure loading up outside his shop (he had a yard at the back) and on his rounds. It was a typical corner shop with wooden shelves piled up to the ceiling. As you went into the shop he had a long fridge along a wall with latched doors made of wood and glass which was a distinctive feature. I remember in the 1950s (I was 10 years old in 1956) thinking it belonged in a museum!"

This photo of Ernie in his shop is with assistant Mrs O'Donald who lived in the next road.

One recollection of helping with milk deliveries comes all the way from the USA, from Patricia who grew up in Tottenham: "*I was born at 37 Markfield Road, a house with the name of "Frances Villa", on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1931. I lived there until 1945 when we moved to 26 Tynemouth Road, adjoining the then Prince of Wales Hospital, where I lived until 1954. My father, Jack Hitchcock, ran a dairy delivery business from the house. My two older brothers worked for him until they joined the armed services in WWII, and during the war, as a 13-year-old, I also delivered milk and collected the week's money on a Saturday. My father's parents had had a dairy business on Markfield Road, at the corner with Broad Lane across the street from the Prince Arthur pub.*" It really was a family business, with everyone helping.

Here are a few other memories about buying milk from a dairy or the milkman: **Audrey** (b.1931) remembers the Express Dairy Co Ltd in Hornsey High Street: "*I used to go there when I was at the "M.A.P. Laundry", used to go across and get a pint of Jersey milk every day. It was cool, they kept the milk at the back. They had empty packets and bottles in the window display. It was all tiled inside. Marble top counter. They had butter pats, they brought out blocks of butter and cut what you wanted and patted it with the wooden pats; it was wrapped in greaseproof paper, they used to fold it in a certain way, sometimes they put a flower pattern on top. It was all full-cream milk, no semi-skimmed. Don't remember cream sold there. They did eggs, not many just after the war. They sold margarine, already wrapped up, 'Stork'. The fridge was probably at the back, they got everything out for you. Men serving, they wore white with a striped apron, and a round white hat with a little peak. Big cash register.*"

And also **Victor** (b.1944), living around Boundary Road on the Tottenham and Wood Green borders remembers milk deliveries during the 1940s-1950s: "*The milkman had a three-wheel handcart. Old Ted, great big boots and bandy legs, pushed it round for years and years. Came Saturday for the money. It was bottled milk, Ted the milkman. The crates were on the cart. Later when it was motorised you could get butter as well because they had a refrigerated cupboard. Ted had long gone by then. And blue tits used to peck the bottle tops.*"

*The scullery had a large butler sink, about 3 feet long, and very deep, on brick piers. In the corner there was a copper, a copper pan, which you lit, it was coal-fired. There was a gas cooker in the scullery and a clothes-rack which you lowered from the ceiling, and a larder, a very large cupboard with air-holes in the door, the coolest place in the house. Wooden shelves in there. Because the scullery floor was stone it was so cold, you could keep meat in the oven for a couple of days [used as a meat safe]. Milk you had to keep in a bowl of water with a tea-cloth over it. Never kept more than two days unless you used sterilised milk. My uncle liked tinned milk, because that's what he'd had in the Army in India in World War Two. "Goat Brand" and "Blue Cross" condensed milk."*



This was favourite milkman Bill Boon, of Turnpike Lane, seen with his horse Nobby outside the Express Dairy in Muswell Hill (nowadays the Mossy Well pub). When he retired in the 1970s, the families he delivered milk to all chipped in to buy him a television for him to enjoy in his retirement.

Bill was a regular  
boon, their very good  
friend the milkman



● BILL BOON puts his feet up and enjoys a leisurely drink next to the telly his regulars bought him—and contemplates the lovely prospect of no more need to get up early each morning.

THIRTY of Bill Boon's regulars raised their glasses and drank his health on Saturday — in milk. It was a sad day for Bill and it was a sad day for the regulars of Coniston Road, Muswell Hill. For they were saying goodbye and thank you to the man who had been putting the pintas on their doorsteps for nearly forty years.

Bill, who lives in Langham Road, off Turnpike Lane, joined Express Dairies in 1936 when the milkman's

horse. Now at 65 he has finally had to call it a day.

There's no doubt he'll be missed. He has always been popular with his customers and in 1948 a grateful regular left him £100 in her will. On Saturday, his Coniston Road customers gave him a goodbye gift of a portable TV set.

So there'll be no more early mornings for Bill. Will he miss his round? "Certainly will," he says. "I could do it for another ten years — I'm as fit as a

A final few thoughts – some from my own childhood memories of growing up in the mid-1970s – of the soothing sound of the electric milk floats, all the different coloured foil tops which indicated the type of milk you were expecting, the challenge of opening those foil tops or making sure you got the creamy bit from full-fat milk on the top of your cornflakes when you opened the milk bottle (and also not wanting the creamy bit to go in your tea!).

I am sure many will remember the humorous gimmicks too used in advertising - trying to get us to drink more milk and to order from our milkman:

*“Watch out, watch out there’s a Humphrey about!”*

Having a vivid imagination as a child that advert was fun but at the same time used to terrify me when I was pouring milk into a glass or Tupperware beaker. Why? Well, the TV advert always showed a celebrity from the 1970s drinking a glass of milk and talking to camera; whilst distracted a silent milk thief in the guise of an extremely long, red-striped straw would sneak onto screen and dip into their glass and suck up all the milk goodness. When the likes of Muhammad Ali reached for their glass of milk, he would find it had all gone ... (and if you want to see more of that, there are lots of reminders of that advert by doing a search on the internet!).

It got me drinking milk though – despite being slightly scared - and, at the time, my ‘Humphrey’ sticker and badge from the milkman was highly prized.

The last fun note goes to the enterprising Express Dairy milk float photographed in the procession for Charter Day in 1934 outside the Billiardrome in Green Lanes, Haringey.

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And that’s it from Memories on a Monday from Bruce Castle. Another topic tomorrow. Take care, keep well and stay home.



Best wishes from everyone from Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock, Curator Haringey Council

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