

## Weekend Wonder: Chiming with History Saturday 2 and Sunday 3 May 2020

Welcome to Weekend Wonder: Chiming with History – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

We pick up with Ken Barker again this weekend as he shares another local story from his family – this time connecting a clock, a famous football club and a Tottenham character....

‘As the chimes of the “grandfather” or long-case clock standing in the entrance hall resound around the museum at Bruce Castle, most visitors will be unaware of the connection with one of the old characters of Tottenham.



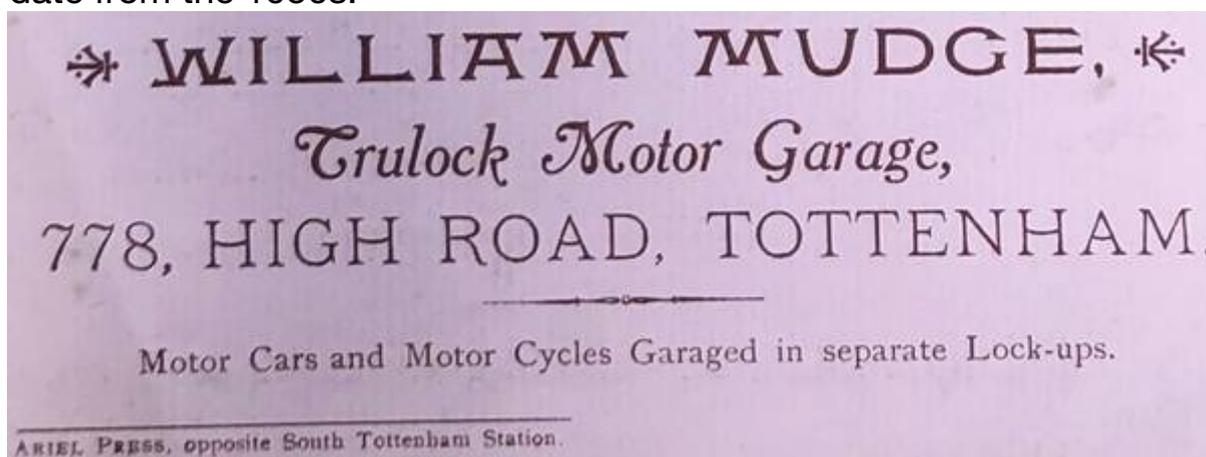


Clock at Bruce Castle (above) and Billy Mudge on his bone-shaker in 1952.

You might remember him from our previous post on Pedal Power.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

William “Billy” Mudge (1872-1966) was one of the characters of Tottenham. He was a lifelong friend of my grandfather, Samuel South (1876-1956), and had conveyed him and his bride in a horse-drawn open carriage to and from their wedding at the Congregational Church, Snells Park in 1899. My own memories of Billy date from the 1950s.



An advert from 1916, advertising Mudge's services.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

Billy operated a chauffeur car hire service from premises in Tottenham High Road, where he lived, which was on the same side and near to the Tottenham Hotspur football ground. The rooms on the ground floor were an Aladdin's Cave of antiques, curios and other fascinating objects. I remember particularly a replica of a tree stump about 6 or 8 feet high on which a stuffed bear was climbing – quite remarkable.

Mudge Jos, L V 'Lord Cardigan' 72 Eglinton rd Bow n 3  
 Mudge W in furniture remover 778 High rd Low Tottenham  
 Mudge William, LV 'St Andrews Head' 86 Rhodeswell rd E 14

By 1921, Mudge had also moved into furniture removals too.

An example of the curious objects was one that he gave me - a patent “blood reviver”. It looked like a small hand drill, with a handle and hard pad where the

drill would be. Cranking the handle caused the pad to vibrate and, I suppose, “invigorate” the blood supply. Eventually, I gave it to our local GP.

My grandfather was a staunch supporter of Spurs (he purchased a share in the Club in 1903) and, at the time I am remembering, each Saturday the First Team was playing at home, Billy Mudge would send a car to collect him. My grandfather would take a Saturday lunch for Billy – plated with a metal cover, wrapped in a tea towel. The two friends would talk and grandfather would help to collect the money from the fans who paid (6d I think) to leave their bicycles in the yard of Mudge's garage - and they gave him a tip before he left for the match! When my grandfather was away, the driver would continue to call for the Saturday lunch. Another relative (Jim South) has recalled that, at one time, Billy Mudge used to convey the Spurs' gate receipts to the bank at half time in one of his cars accompanied by a mounted police man.



The entrance to the Spurs football ground, during the 1920s.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

I remember Billy Mudge as a large, elderly and kindly man, usually wearing a khaki ‘duster’ coat. I recall being driven by him in one of his cars along the Great Cambridge Road. We proceeded at a very stately pace with cyclists overtaking us! On one of his cars there was a Cockerel mascot on the bonnet and when a wire was pulled on the dash board the [appropriate sound was produced!](#) Later, in 1961, I stood outside his premises and watched the [Spurs’ ‘Double’ Team](#) parade the trophies along the High Road.



Spurs' fans souvenir badges and pins worn to celebrate the 1961 win!

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

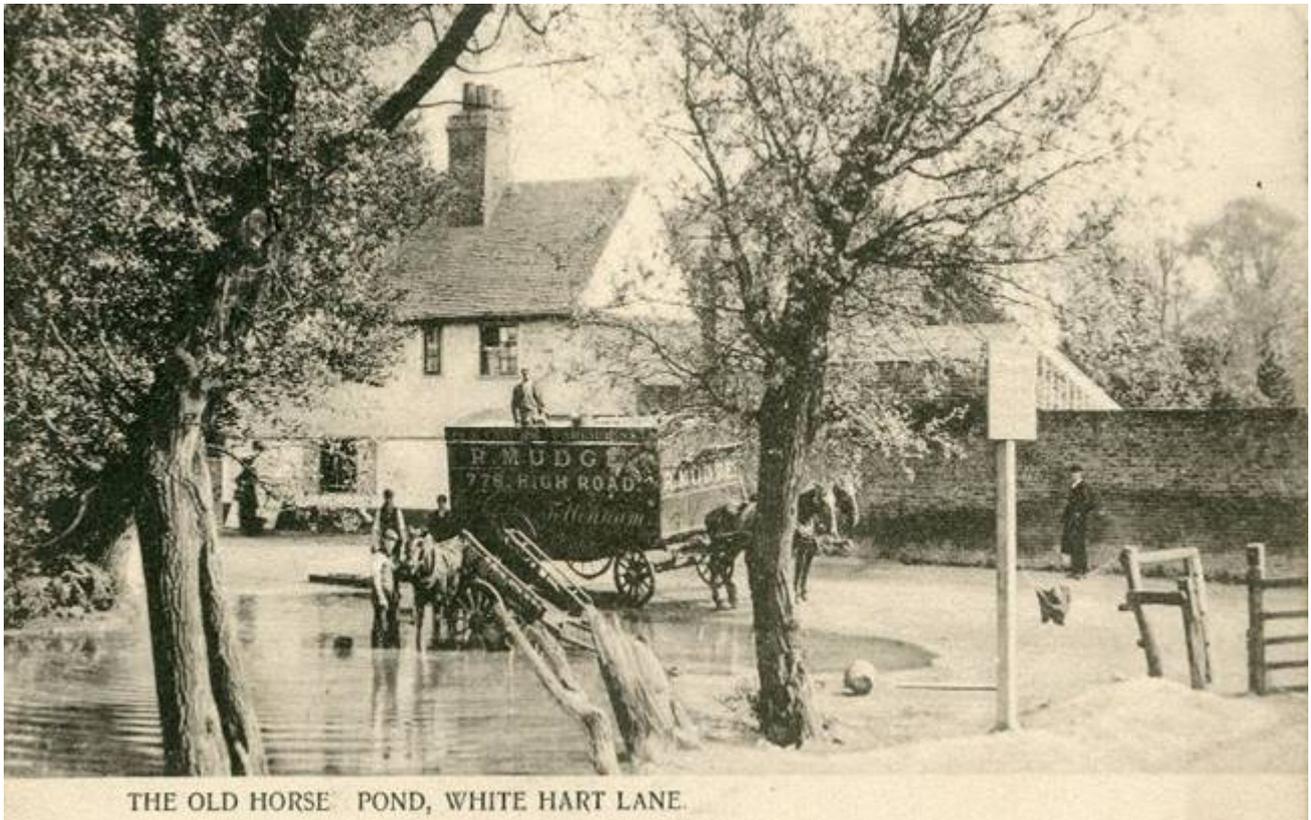
There is mention of Billy in other recollections - Herbert Hawkes in his '*Tottenham Shops - A Personal Memory*' (published by [Edmonton Hundred Historical Society](#): Occasional Paper No. 46):

"Mr. Mudge, corn chandler and proprietor of cars for weddings, funerals and other family events. His yard entrance bore the sign '*Slow up to 60 mph up this gateway*' and his house was reputed to be ancient and panelled. This and neighbouring fragments of old walls makes me wonder if it had any link with the Black House where Henry VIII was reputed to have stayed."

My aunt, Hilda Beech (1902-1995), a member of the Society, responded in a letter:

"You refer to Mudge. He did not own the corn chandler. That was his brother. Mr W. Mudge drove my father and mother to their wedding in 1899. He remained a great friend of our family and was at their Golden wedding.

He was quite old and eccentric and, yes, there was panelling in his old and dilapidated house. He left some antiques to me in his will. Unfortunately everything had been stolen and, as it was not insured, we had nothing. He had a grandfather clock that was to go to the Spurs - I wonder if they had it?"



THE OLD HORSE POND, WHITE HART LANE.

The horse-drawn commercial waggon for Mudge resting by the pond at Rectory Farm on White Hart Lane, c.1895-1900.

This waggon has the name 'R. Mudge', indicating Billy's mother Rebecca.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

He died in January 1966 and was buried with his mother in the old part of Tottenham Cemetery. Alas, few of us were at his funeral - a sad occasion for me. The clock was received by Spurs and, later [in 1968], it was donated to Bruce Castle Museum where its chimes are an audible reminder of a great Tottenham character.'

And in 1952, the *Tottenham Weekly Herald* ran the following article:

### *Memories of one of Tottenham's first motorists*

Memories of the days when Tottenham was just a country village – before the motor car and aeroplane were invented – were revived this week when a “Herald” reporter interviewed Mr. William Mudge, a local resident and garage proprietor for more than half-a-century, who will be 80 on Sunday.

Mr. Mudge seems to know everybody and everybody who is anybody knows Mr. Mudge. He lives at his garage in the High Road, not far from the Spurs' ground – which recalls one of his vivid memories. In 1901, the Spurs played Sheffield in the final and won the cup. Mr. Mudge drove a four-horse-brake to St. Pancras station to bring home the victorious team. He was met by a big crowd of excited supporters.

*“They wouldn't let me drive the Spurs team home” Mr. Mudge said. “The supporters took out the horses and pushed the carriage and the team back to Tottenham. They waved flags, shouted, cheering and fed the horses all the way.”*

Later, the Spurs gave Mr. Mudge £30 to repair the damage caused to the carriage by fans collecting trophies on the way.

Mr. Mudge, who has a keen sense of humour, was born in Tottenham. In those days, the Moselle brook ran along the surface of what is now Tottenham High Road and as a boy he used a tin bath as a boat to cross the brook when it overflowed. The old building which now houses his garage and workshops used to be a hunting lodge, owned by the Duke of Northumberland.

Young William went to Lancasterian School and began working for his parents at 13. He soon learnt to drive a four-horse-brake, and he drove the local fire engine. He kept two horses groomed and ready from seven in the morning till seven at night for fire calls..

When fire broke out Mr. Mudge, who wore his fireman's suit all day, would don brass helmet and hatchet and take the horses to Coombes Croft, where the fire engine was kept. On the way back from a fire at the Marshes, the fire engine fell into a ditch and had to be dragged out by horses.



The firemen based at Coombes Croft, north Tottenham, seen c.1890. Perhaps the young Billy Mudge is amongst them?

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

*“People who hired hansom cabs thought I was too young to drive.” He said, “When I went out to drive wedding parties I always used to buy a false moustache to make me look older. You could just stick those moustaches under your nose and they looked very good with top hat and tail-coat.”*

He also drove a large pantehnicon and kept 28 horses in the stables for removal work. There used to be a large pond in White Hart Lane where he used to wash the vans and carriages.

When he was 18, Mr. Mudge drove a New Zealand Prime Minister to Epping Forest to show him the trees. But this important visitor was not impressed. *“I haven’t seen a real tree since I have been in England”*, said the P.M.

In spite of his busy life, Mr. Mudge had many other interests in his youth. He kept chickens, ducks, geese, pheasants and partridges and even did some acting on stage at the old Hippodrome in Angel Road, Edmonton.

Every Saturday there used to be a soul-searing dramatic “Melodrama” on at the Hippodrome and Mr. Mudge would go to the producer regularly to ask for a part. Once he dressed in red coat and breeches and rode a horse on the stage.

He didn’t get paid for acting. *“I did it for the fun of the thing”*, he says.

Mr. Mudge always kept ahead of the times and when the wonderful new “horseless carriage” was introduced, he was one of the first to try it.

*“The best car I ever rode in was driven by steam”*, he said. *“It took a long time to get going, but when moving it was a beautiful ride. There were no gears to worry about.”*

*I had one of the first single cylinder motor cars and later bought a three-cylinder horseless carriage from Dr. Scott, who lived nearby. It cost me about £25, I think, and was a very good runner.*

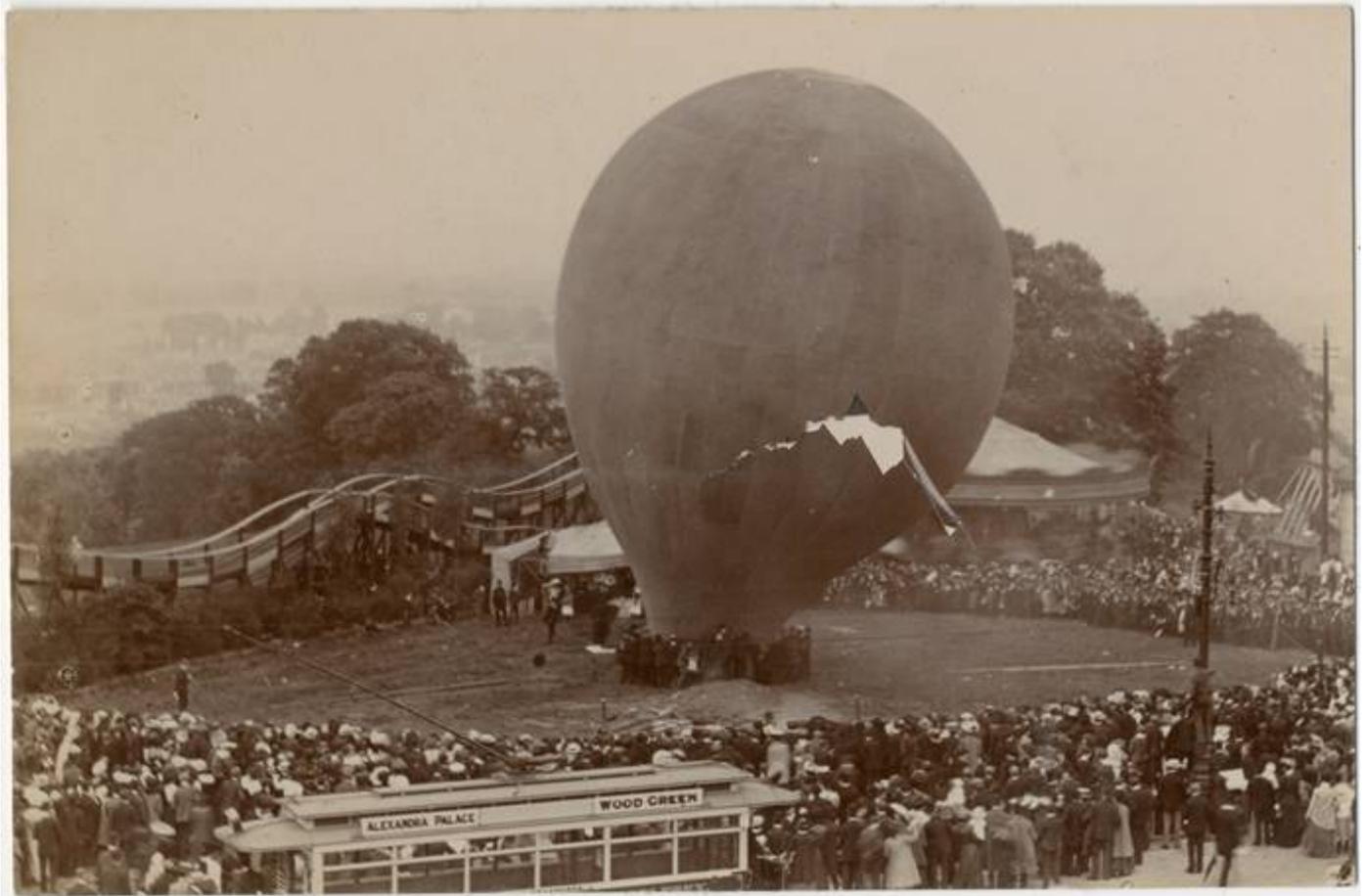
*I was glad in a way to see the horses go out because there was so much cruelty to horses in those early days of the motor-car. A man would pay £70 for a good horse and then employ an inexperienced [hobble-dehoy](#) to look after it. The horse was soon ruined.”*

In 63 years of motor-driving, Mr. Mudge has driven many important people and has seen many local families grow up. This week a woman came to book cars for her daughter’s wedding.

*“You drove me on my own wedding fifty years ago,”* she told Mr. Mudge.

Mr. Mudge drove aviators and balloonists to Alexandra Palace where he watched their displays.

*“I never thought man would ever fly then,”* he said. *“But then the aeroplane was invented, I tried flying.”*



Balloonists at Alexandra Palace.c.1900.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archives and Museum Service)

*“The secret of success,” says Mr. Mudge, “is hard work. You must make friends and gain the confidence of your customers. Personality is important. I would sooner have a man’s friendship than his wallet.”*

Asked about his possible retirement, Mr. Mudge just smiled and with a twinkle in his eye said, *“No, I am not due for retirement yet. I shall jog along for a few more years yet.”* He still owns his own business and takes an active part in the work, driving his own car.

If you want an example of Mr. Mudge’s dry humour, look at the notice outside the narrow entrance to his garage in the High Road. It says: ‘Slow down to 60 M.P.H up this gateway.’ “



© Henry Jacobs

Honouring Billy's wishes, the Directors of Spurs received the very large long-case clock and had it on display in their Boardroom. By 1968, they had donated it to Bruce Castle Museum, where it has been ever since and has always been called the Spurs' clock. Many people, including football fans, come to see it and hear its chimes. Grandparents, and parents too, come back week after week at the request of small children especially who want to hear it chiming away. We also feature the clock as part of our tactile touch-tours, where groups can explore the clock using just touch, and listen to its workings and sounds.

The Spurs clock would be described by clockmakers as a 'chiming clock' as it has more elaborate functions than just striking the hours. It chimes with a series of bells every quarter of the hour, and then on the hour as well. When we do tours of the building, or when teaching schoolchildren in the galleries, and you are standing nearby, you can always bank on the clock chiming just as you are about to speak.



© Henry Jacobs

We think this clock would have really appealed to Billy's sense of humour. Nothing is quite what it seems. The highly-ornate and carved long-case, with creatures and faces all over it, says that it dates from 1759 – but it isn't that old. It is a Victorian 'joke' to make it look older than it actually is. The face of the clock gives the game away with the actual date recorded of 1840. When we wind it once a week and open the long-case, you get a surprise too, as the pendulum smiles back at you with a beautiful painted picture of a smiling sun on it. Not many people get to see that.

Its sheer size is something else as well – there are not many places that a clock of this size could fit. Maybe because it filled a room that was the reason why it left Spurs (or maybe it was because of its frequent chiming?) – but whatever the reason, we are happy to have such a wonderful clock at Bruce Castle.

Let's hope we can get back soon, to wind it up again and hear its friendly chimes. And in the meantime, take a look at our Drawing Activity sheet for Families attached - all about the Spurs clock.

With our thanks once again to Ken Barker for sharing his memories.

Take care, stay well

Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

Deborah Hedgecock  
Curator

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