

FIGHT FOR THE BRIDLE PATH (Or the Battle for Lovers Lane)

Although the King waxed lyrically about her during his parliamentary speech! DORA was not every one's favourite and certainly she was no 'maid of Orleans' (Schiller) but unlike the Govan Schoolteacher John Maclean (Oct 1915) those opposing DORA this day would not be exacted to the full force of the judicial mechanism being that 'hostilities' had ended some 18 months prior;

This twentieth century DORA was born in August 1914 under special powers concerning the Defence of the Realm and was widely applied throughout the land.

Thus the scene was set between the Parish's of Hanworth and Feltham and the authorities.

The Bridle-path itself was an ancient track from Bedfont through Feltham (Smitchells upper meadow) onto Hanworth and thence to Hampton and the Thames. Faintly shown on a map by Rocques of 1754 and Moses Glover's somewhat 'roaming map' of 1635 and later still the O/S Maps, its existence was by centuries of local use.

Much of the following are extracts from an article that appeared in the Middlesex Chronicle Saturday 24th April 1920

The dispute concerning the closure of the bridle-path across Hanworth Park-under the provisions of DORA, by the Air Ministry, reached a crisis on Saturday April 17th 1920 and culminated in a full assertion of the rights of the inhabitants of the two districts accomplished, as will be seen by the full descriptions, in perfectly good humour on both sides and altogether devoid of overt act or regrettable incident.

Mr. Parker, and the other leaders of the movement, had an anxious and busy time for several days preceding the wonderful and unique demonstrations that resulted as every safeguard had to be organised to ensure a strict observance of the purely technical attitude under which they were desirous of asserting the public rights.

As arranged, the intention to enforce the public right of way was duly notified to the Air Ministry, who at once sent down an agent to reconnoitre and to interview the veteran chief of the movement and the clerk of the Council, re-asserting the claim of the Ministry to the path and deprecating the resort to extreme measures. Simultaneously, as if in concert, Mr. JA Whitehead came unexpectedly athwart the line with glowing pictures of another of his syndicates, a future factory with

prospective employment for thousands of residents, and assurances of another path in compensation for the loss of the original (Elmwood Avenue)

Notwithstanding, this sop, and a further missive from the Air Ministry giving "permission" for the Council and its people who would be "permitted" to traverse their beloved path for that occasion only and only as an act of grace on the part of the Air Ministry, did not meet with approval by the Councillors concerned.

Accordingly, a special meeting of the authority was called for that Friday evening to finalize the arrangements for the morrow in the light of the information given by the two remarkable visitors who had attempted to dissuade them.

At the meeting were Messrs. JA Parker J.P. (in the chair) Mr Angelo Colorossi, HA Everitt, J Hawes, ET Pascoe, T Tinnelly, WJ Wigley and E. Wade Winch together with Messrs. JH Sandy (clerk) and H.WA Carter (surveyor).

The Chairman opened with the information that during the day Mr. Whitehead had called with a Captain Peters, saying that he did not want the procession to take place as he had a "big financial scheme a foot" – to which Mr Tinnelly (Cllr) said "he always has" - (Mr. Pascoe; "he's had it for years") 'The latter two always in cohort'

'Lovers Lane was between the back wall of Falkland House (on the right) and, on the left, Collins Cottages' now Cavendish Terrace

The meeting continued in this vein for some time. The chairman continued, "Mr. Whitehead did not want any disturbance till after his scheme was settled. Mr. Tinnelly "*Naturally*") "They could then do as they liked." Mr. Tinnelly, again "*Oh! nice*"

Mr. Whitehead was forming a syndicate to open the works again and to employ even more hands than during the war. He, (Mr. Whitehead) thought "this would be of very great benefit to Feltham."

The Chairman went on to say "Of course I do not see that we could make any bargain with Mr. Whitehead, as at present the latter had no power in the matter, the works being in the hands of the Official Receiver, Mr. Wigley retorted "*He wants us to let him sell our path and then get it back, if we can, from someone else*"

Thus the die was cast. Feltham was going to have its own "Battle", and the rights of the population hereabouts would be insisted upon and their beloved "Lover's Lane" returned to them.

Mr. J Wilkins, of the Feltham Branch of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers wrote to the Council that the *members of the branch had unanimously declared their support and would be taking their place alongside the populace.*

Notices were posted throughout Feltham to rally the people. The day came and the people gathered and the Reverend Browell lent his presence to the growing throng that grew with every step, until it seemed the whole of the population was on the move. The point at which the Park was entered was the entrance adjoining Falklands, it having been deemed expedient to follow this route on the outward journey, leaving the encounter with the wall obstructing the bridle path at the Feltham end until the return march.

All along the route were seen groups of mounted and foot constables calmly surveying the trudging townsfolk and there were numerous Air Force officers watching with interest.

There was an outburst of wild cheering when the gates of the Rookery were reached and shouts of "*Hurrah for Mr. Parker*", and "*Good old sport*". They rested awhile at this point, the trudge through the mud and standing pools of water had taken their toll, but on resuming the return journey their ranks were swelled by many from the Hanworth end.

They had to detour from the path briefly where a shed had been built across the bridle path but they finally reached a part of the park resembling a cul de sac near the canteen and other buildings of the factory whose roofs were crowded with photographers and other reporters, and there was the Wall.

Between nine and twelve feet high it loomed ahead of them and then the serious work of the afternoon began. A scaffolding pole from Mr. Parker's Timber yard lay on the grass where it had been placed earlier in readiness and a call for volunteers rang out. When the battering first commenced a roar rang out as some twenty men from Feltham and Hanworth swung the pole and for the first time it hit the wall. The excitement reached a crescendo when the first bricks began to yield. First one, then a rush of bricks and rubble cascaded down and finally the wall was breached and through the now-gaping hole the cheering crowd could see another jubilant crowd the other side.

Two men clambered up and sitting astride the wall began working at it with hammer and chisel and in less than half an hour had succeeded in effecting a breach sufficient to allow the passage of the processionists one at a time.

Triumphantly waving their hats and with Mr. Parker still leading, the Councillors were first to pass through, amid uproarious cheering and shout of "Over the Top". Followed by the elated hundreds, they led the way through the old bridle gate adjoining the Park Gate Stores and back to the Green, where the veteran champion of the public rights briefly addressed his loyal supporters.

On behalf of the Councillors he thanked all for attending and conducting everything in such an orderly manner. He thanked especially the returned soldiers for lending their hand in breaching the wall, and he hoped a wall would never be built across their bridle path again. (loud cheering and shouts of "*if it is we'll knock it down again*").

All the above described scenes were filmed by the Gaumont Company and were shown in all the principle London cinemas on the Thursday of that week.

O/S Map of 1864 showing Bridle path, bottom of map



View circa 1900

