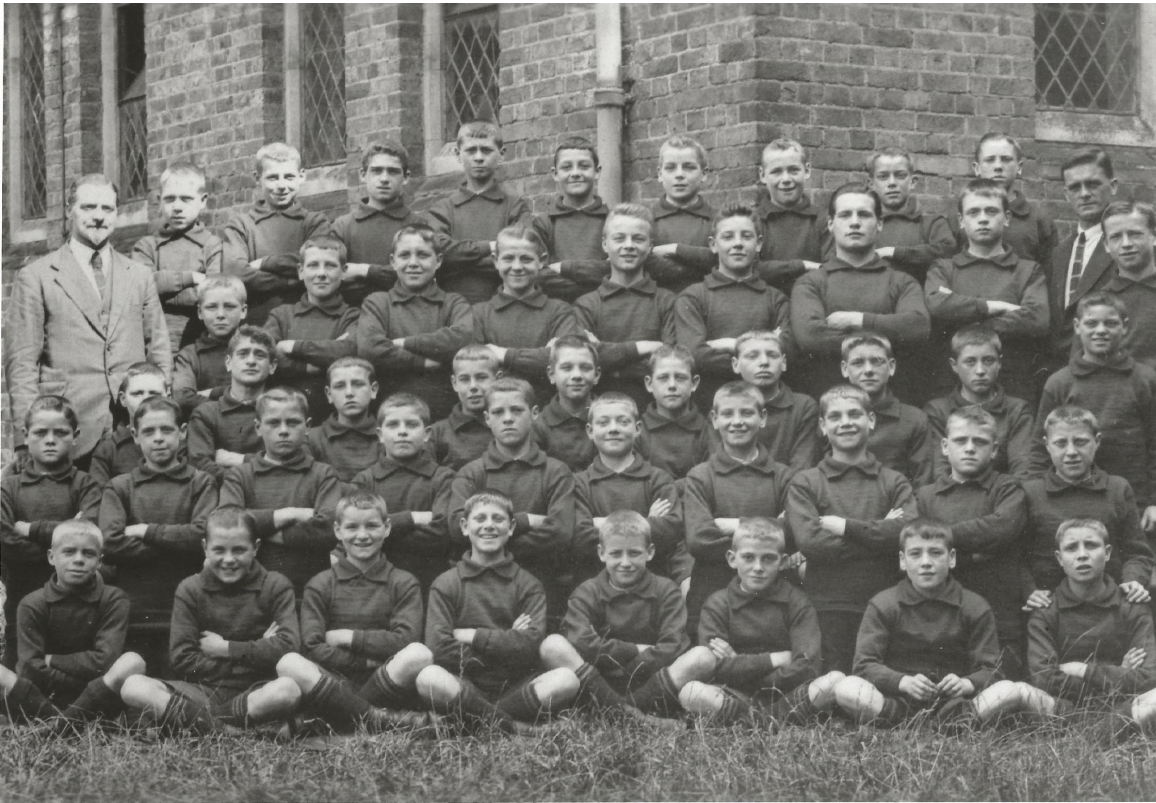


Things that go bump in the park



Students from the St Pancras Workhouse/School, 1930s. Picture: Leavesden Hospital History Association

by **Martin T Brooks**

LIKE many old Victorian buildings and grounds, the former Leavesden Asylum/Hospital site has its fair share of stories involving ghostly figures, strange sounds and various other unexplainable occurrences which have on some occasions raised goose bumps on those who believed they have been in the presence of such otherworldly visitors.

St Pancras Workhouse and Industrial School was located on the south side of the park from 1868 to 1930 and was the home of many children who would have been housed in the main building and attended separate schools located just down the path towards Langley Lane and the Horses Field.

Before the modern lighting was installed, this path was very dark and many people who walked along it at night would later tell of hearing the sounds of children laughing and talking in low whispers. This was long before the park had a playground across the road and during times when any of the local youngsters should have been home and safely tucked into their beds.

Research into this area of the original workhouse/school site revealed that there may have been a children's cemetery somewhere nearby. This cemetery might have been where the young residents of the workhouse/school would have been laid to rest and why, to this day, you might hear the sounds of children whose spirits still run playfully through the park.

Along Leavesden High Road you can still see one very large old manor house that was once owned by Manuel Almunia, goalkeeper for Arsenal Football Club and later Watford, who once lived in the house.

Almunia and his wife both reported hearing the sounds of chains rattling about in the loft and their stereo turning on by itself while they were both sleeping and no one else was in the house. Almunia's wife also woke in a start one night to see the ghostly figure of a monk holding a candle passing through their bedroom and exiting through the wall.

Needless to say, they didn't stay in the house for long after that.

The Gate Lodge, and the large house that used

to be just across from it, have been the location of more than one sighting of a ghostly figure which was first mentioned in the early 1950s.

During a visit by a paranormal investigation group, one of the mediums/spiritualists present sensed the presence of a tall, male figure dressed in black clothing, who was watching the group from the trees nearby. She had the feeling that this person had died in a fire near this location. This ghostly figure was also been seen by a former resident of the Gate Lodge and on one occasion in 2018 might have actually been photographed.

Research uncovered that in the early 1950s there was indeed a fire in this gate lodge and the gate keeper, described in documents as a tallish man fond of wearing long dark coats, died in the lodge and may still be roaming the house and grounds he guarded in life.

Located in the north side of the park, just beyond the tennis courts, where there now stands a totem pole, was the isolation ward. This would have been the home of patients who would have had any number of contagious diseases such as cholera, typhoid and scarlet fever. Nursing sisters would have lived in the nearby bungalows and walked to the isolation ward to care for their patients but would not have been allowed into the main buildings for fear of contaminating the patients/staff there.

One such dedicated nurse was Sister Holly, who cared for her patients for almost 19 years until she unfortunately caught one of these diseases and died in 1918. For many years after that, people walking through the park have reported seeing a small figure, dressed all in white, walking down the path next to the tennis courts, crossing the field where the isolation ward was, and quietly disappearing into the shadow covered woods on the other side.

Could this be the ghost of Nurse Holly, still going to the isolation ward to care for her patients?

There are many more stories to tell about disembodied voices being recorded in and around the two old cemeteries, photographs being taken of floating orbs of light as well as mysterious spectral images. But maybe those will be told around a campfire, late at night when the doorway to the other side is a little more open to us.



St Pancras Workhouse boys/girls schools. Picture: Leavesden Hospital History Association



Former home of Manuel Almunia along Leavesden High Road. Picture: Google Maps



The subway under College Road. Picture: Martin T Brooks



The former location of the isolation ward. Picture: Martin T Brooks