

## HEPPER FAMILY LONDON HOLIDAY, July 1945

### Diary of F.Nigel Hepper (born March 1929) & parents from Leeds

[See End Notes 1 & 2]

[typed with notes added 2012 on doc diary London holiday1945, Microsoft Word]

#### TUESDAY JULY 24, 1945

Lovely day, hot, though grey most of AM.

Up 6.30 as the great day here – **London**. Off 6.45 to Central Station [Leeds] for 7.50, fairly empty, though several reserved troop carriages, & all got seat in dining car [no meals served]. Nobody standing. Mum & Dad bought piles of papers to read but I mostly looked out, dozed at times (Dad slept). Quite a nice soldier chap from Pontefract next to me. The corn fields marvellous and many large ones, some reaped. Could also see several aerodromes with many planes about. Arrived Kings Cross 12.40, ten minutes late only. London at last.

Got tube to Covent Garden; tubes marvellous things with escalators and sliding doors, then walked right through the market but no selling [going] on, & to Strand Palace Hotel. Really flash modern place of Portland stone & up-to-date interior. I'm staying at the **Samson's** tonight as no room here till tomorrow [See Endnote 3], but to their room No 524 through many long passages. Lunch in grand hall with small orchestra. Menu in French: I had ?,omelette, beautiful ice-cream and café noir.

PM wandered to Thames near flash new Waterloo bridge to Big Ben. Some war scars. Caught bus to near St Paul's which we entered by side door and looked about inside though there was a service on, so stayed a bit & went out the same way as we came in after pulling the door open. Saw much bomb damage near by, but many houses only shells so it doesn't look so bad. Crowds of taxis. Streets quite wide and decent white buildings. Dad back to hotel to see if there was a message or other. Mum & I on bus to Oxford Circus (Regent Street buildings marvellous) & looked at **Britain's Aircraft Exhibition** with Lancaster, Mosquito, Walrus, Spitfire. Moth & others and parts [See Endnote 4]. Joined by Dad and walked to **Hyde Park**, beautiful **Selfridges** not like a shop, & sat in [**Hyde**] **Park** (they even charge 2d for a chair). Sparrows and pigeons very tame. Watched traffic along **Park Lane**, bomb damaged opposite; crowds of people sitting out. Got underground to **Charing Cross**. To Hotel. Waited for **Samsons** who came at 7.30 & we had marvellous dinner: I had soup, a lot of lobster, lettuce and mayonnaise etc, large ice & lemonade. The band was playing & some dancing. The **Samsons** took us to their flat (**Hyde Park Mansions**) though Mum felt very tired. Very nice flat, talked & had coffee, they went at 10.30 and I am staying the night.

#### WEDNESDAY JULY 25, 1945

Warm, grey mostly but quite bright, started to rain late PM.

Woke up 6.15 as **Mr Samson** was moving around; could hear the Underground beneath at minute intervals. Up 7.30, into large room for breakfast of plums, kippers and Rivita. With **Mr Samson**, 8.15 caught bus by **Great Central Hotel** where **John** was before going to India [See Endnote 6] and passed **Maples** where there was a large, costly fire last night. Saw more damage. Got out at **Covent Garden** & we wandered around it. Central Hall out of use, the peaches, grapes etc in plenty but grapes are 25/- lb & peaches similar. Cases and cases of plums, tomatoes (we've had 3 this year), apples etc. Went on to new **Waterloo Bridge**, really magnificent. **Strand Palace** 9.0 & waited 1/2 hr for them [Mum & Dad] as they had to queue for breakfast. To their room and changed into sports coat.

**To Kew Gardens.** We walked to bus stop near & caught bus to Acton Vale at 10.15 after doing several things at the Hotel and after people had barged in front of the queue for first bus. Changed there for Kew Gardens (got good views of West London & many streets simply burnt out & wall left, others need painting & repairing as many are Victorian houses with painted walls.) Mum bought plums and apples near the gate which we ate just inside (at 11.30). Wandering around the huge grounds we saw many great trees all with name tabs; also the flower beds beautiful and named. Greenhouses open at 1.0 pm so had snack lunch at far [S] end under a huge, rather prickly Cedar of Lebanon [A species I later studied in detail.]. All over the place there are large avenues in length and width of grass with trees at both sides; they give me an impression of size. We left Mum to rest while Dad & I wandered around looking for the model allotments, but not seeing them went into the huge, not very beautiful Palm House. It was most interesting with all the jungle plants; saw bananas ripening [See Endnote 7] After quick survey – for that is all we have time for in one day – we went back to Mum in another tremendous house of tropical plants which were mostly in beds, not pots. [The Temperate House. See Endnote 8] We all went into a smaller house with a very oppressive, hot atmosphere for cucumbers & weird climbing things, also giant water-lilies & beautiful fuchsias. [Water-lily House.] Dad & I to the allotments [war-time Demonstration Plots on the Kew Palace lawn. See Endnote 5]: most of our [Leeds] plants as good; & to Kew Palace where we looked at the old furniture & pictures. On to a large museum [The Orangery Timber Museum. See Endnote 6] which we could only skim thro' of trees & minute models of Indians working [on indigo dye plants] etc. Joined Mum by the Lake and had 5 minutes sit, then peeped into another museum of seeds, fruits etc [Museum No.1 opposite the Palm House and pond. See Endnote 9] (each of these needs a day to really see them). Dahlia avenue beautiful.

Out of Kew (for how long?) [See Endnote 10] & caught 65 bus to Ealing Broadway. Changed to District railway in which I felt very tired. To Hotel 5.0. Got key No.5XL (5<sup>th</sup> floor). Very nice room with basin, mirror, dresser let into wardrobe & telephone. To tea snack. 6.10 to Duchess Theatre (we really are doing ourselves well), to see "Blithe Spirit". I'm very surprised at the small theatre [we were used to the huge Grand Theatre in Leeds], feels like an amateur show.

However, play very amusing & a good set of actors. It was about a chap who had his 1<sup>st</sup> wife back as a spirit & couldn't get her away, though he could see and hear her his second wife couldn't – what fun! 9.0 back to hotel very near, to grill room for large skate & potatoes, ice & ginger beer; the waitress talkative & nice.

#### **THURSDAY JULY 26, 1945**

Grey and slight rain at times, cooler.

Woke up 6.45 as much plate clanking in the kitchens opposite. Up 7.30, all down 8.0; only small queue & in to breakfast of flakes, sausage & potatoes, toast & buns with a lot of marmalade & butter, coffee (very strong). Long queue later. Mum to see the remains of her houses [at Blackheath] all morning; said the damage was terrible around the E. End [See Endnote 12]

Dad & I to **Westminster Abbey**, lovely to see the place as didn't see it in 1937 as Coronation preparation was on. Walked through cloisters, very peaceful. Watched **Big Ben** strike 10.0. Walked past **Wellington barracks** & saw **Guards Chapel** where many [200] were killed [by a flying bomb on 18 June 1944.] also some Guards (in khaki, of course.) To **Buckingham Palace**, but no changing of the guard [which is] every other day. Thro' Green Park as raining & to Hotel for coats, then it stopped. Bus to Gt. Portland St. on look out for **Seaby's coin place** but couldn't find it, so had coffee at a small back street café. Found Seaby's: a small shop of 2 rooms above another, but plenty of coins; bought catalogue for 5/- & looked at some coins; bought K. George V 1924 Maunday set for 15/-. To Hotel at 12.15.

Joined by Mum & we had a light lunch & queued for "dejeuner". As **[General] Election results** [were] being known they had a screen up & gave the latest results. **LABOUR IN**, worse luck – or is it? That remains to be seen; certainly something needs doing about houses, etc. etc.. [See Endnote 11]

To **National Gallery**: not all pictures there, some marvellous ones but many horrid (no other word with religious subjects.) I have a small but beastly spot in awkward place which hurts each time I walk, & Dad seems to love walking thro' the streets. Looking thro vast bookshop, **Foyles**, to find a book to buy with my token but so many it is bewildering. Light tea at **Lyons [Corner House.]** To **Royal Academy**. Expected to see terrible designs of "modern art", but none of that & simply wonderfully done like photos 2 of Mrs Andrew's bird pictures [See End Note 13] Not many people there so we were able to sit and admire the pictures. A painting of the K[ing] & Q[ueen] magnificent, esp. Q. To Hotel.

To dinner, in very soon, of hors d'oeuvre, lamb chop, potatoes, spinach; creamy ice; stone ginger; most of time band playing dance music & many dancing in space between their courses. 8.0 out with Dad but I turned back at Admiralty Arch as uncomfortable walking. Crowds of American soldiers about, more of them than ours, also many of them from the

Dominions & elsewhere. About 1/2 the cars on the roads are taxis & another ¼ are buses.  
Wandered back to Hotel.

### **FRIDAY JULY 27, 1945**

Grey AM, some sun PM. slight NW breeze,

During night stretched my arms when I woke up once and hit the telephone near my bed so that there was a tinging, however nobody came in to see what was happening.

Up 7.30, Mum & Dad down just before & got a table. Breakfast of puffed wheat, herring, toast etc. With Dad in writing room & wrote to John [in India].

Dad hoped to go to **Whipsnade [Zoo]** but too far & no direct transport, somewhat disappointed but decided to go to **Hampton Court**. Caught Underground at Charing Cross after waiting 10 minutes & watching other trains; they have a flash indicator idea showing which train is next. Out at **Richmond** & as Mum wanted to show me the **Thames** there we went to it. Seeing rowing boats there we enquired about them – 15/- for 2 hrs! as compared to *Whetherby* 2/- 2hrs, so we didn't go on one unfortunately. As we found a pleasure motor boat (quite large) going to **Hampton Court** so on we went. 11.30 off, had good seat on top [with] good view, quite a large wash swaying small boats. Really very interesting as we could see the summer buses & boats there, many very nice ones. Had to go through a lock (my 1<sup>st</sup> time) which took about 1/4hr [See End Note 14] & landed there [Hampton Court] at 12.40.

Magnificent building built in 3 stages: Henry VIII, William & Mary, George II. Walked straight through to main gardens & long lake somewhat weedy now, but the grounds beautiful with herbaceous borders (where unexploded 1000lb bomb fell). Dad off to look at flowers. Mum & I inside (6d) looking at the rooms with the less valuable pictures & a few tapestries as the rest are still "evacuated". Then down into the King's (empty) wine cellars. Had a look at the lovely little garden, the King's private one. By that time it was 2.0 & to boat (another one, steam), off at 2.15, same trip in opposite direction in the sun. 7 or 8 other similar ships passed us up & many smaller craft including "little ships" & coal barges [See Endnote 16]. Thro' parallel lock as tug & large barge-train in other. Richmond 3.15 after enjoyable trip. Into wood-panelled café for tea, toasted teacakes, cakes & ice-cream. (Who said it was difficult to get food out?) [See End Note 15 ] Underground (District hardly runs underground at all) to Charing Cross. Wandered thro' ...to **Waterloo Bridge** and good view: could see the **Tower [of London] theatres**; admired the bridge & fine buildings along the **Embankment** of Portland stone (as many London buildings are, including this Hotel.) Back to Hotel 5.15.

Mum to see **Doris Pailthorpe** but [she had] removed. [See Endnote 17] Dad & I to **St Martin's theatre** to see thriller "Shop at Sly Corner". Quite a good theatre, little larger than *Duchess*. Play good & well acted. Rich jeweller black-mailed by his shop assistant whom he murdered, then thought he was found out so he committed suicide with poison dart, but

wasn't really found out. 9.0 to grill room for fried cod, potatoes, peas, ice, stone ginger, also met Mum there.

[Dad] started talking to another waitress & discussing the theatres. Dad off on stroll & apparently didn't want me (?) so Mum and I walked along the Strand: lights on as bright as day. And so to bed. Most people bewildered about the [General] election results, though hardly a murmur about it unless someone talks about it directly.

### **SATURDAY JULY 28, 1945**

Lovely day, hot, some clouds.

Mum came to my room at 7.15; she'd made a mistake about time and got up at 6.55, thinking it was 7.55! Small but slow queue, to breakfast after 1/4hr. Message from **Auntie Joan** [See Endnote 18] to ring them which used up some time but fairly soon got through. Bus to London Bridge, but we got off at at wrong end so wasted time walking across it. However, after all our rushing the train (Southern Electric) was quite empty. It stopped at every station & we eventually arrived at 11.35 (started at 10.20) at Haywards Heath & met by **Auntie Joan and Ann**. I wanted to post a 'Penquin' [book] to J.S.W. so Ann took me to PO [Post Office] & we cut across to their house & met Uncle Geoff. I'd quite forgotten his looks, very nice; he has a very quick and nice way of talking, & he certainly can talk! Ann is now 12. Auntie just the same. Looked round their lovely house, only built in 1940 with 2 bedrooms to prevent billeting, but they can build on. The lounge is very nice & airy with 2 pianos at present as they bought a new one (they are very musical), and Uncle's carpets/rugs on the floor he made some time ago. The dining room is small but 7 people can get round the oval table, it is just near the kitchen with a hatch. The kitchen is quite long and narrow with an Aga and fridge, cupboards etc near sink. The outside is very nice, plenty of sweeping roof & painted walls with roses in full bloom over walls & roof around dormer windows. The lawn slopes rather & the garden is smaller than I thought, though very pretty. It is surrounded by trees & shrubs like a wood. A house is each side but only one is seen because of the trees & both are pretty. At the bottom of the lawn there is an artificial "wild" pond in the process of being made, fed (or will be) by a stream which he will dam; from the pond there is a small "well" so that when the pond is full it flows into the well which is joined by an underground pipe to another small one which, when full, allows the water to flow away. They keep about 6 hens. So much for their house.

Almost immediately we had coffee in the wide porch from the French window off the lounge. We talked, walked and looked round. I also killed many cabbage whites as they landed on the *Buddleja*, Very nice lunch of salad & ham & tongue, ice-cream with stewed rasps & redcurrants. More talk & at 3.45 Uncle suggested going out, so we went out in their Morris, leaving Mum and Auntie to talk over old times (they were at school together). Sussex is very wooded which makes the ups and downs look hillier & more beautiful. At one place near by we saw through the yew hedges a huge house made of Elizabethan materials, though not

built then. A certain rich man bought 8 mansions, carefully pulled them down and built another with the same materials in Elizabethan style. The ground he built it on was not very large so to impress the people who came, faked it up to look larger e.g. by having a wrought iron gate leading nowhere, and using the church's east window as the central end of the long, tree-lined drive. Then we drove thro' **Balcombe** where we saw a very pretty house with a gorgeous bed of mixed phlox & a lawn sloping steeply to the lake with masses of water-lilies & the reflection of flowers could be seen in it.

We got back at 5.10 for afternoon tea in the garden under 2 large willows by the pond. **Ann** is still quite young in her playing. 7.30 another big dinner of plaice & jam tarts. 8.0 walked across hills by auction mart. to station 2 minutes before train came in, at 8.22. A stopping train but Dad snoozed. **London Bridge** 9.20, walked right along to **Westminster** seeing lights launch, boys on **Discovery**, etc. Hotel 11.0.

### **SUNDAY JULY 29, 1945**

Lovely at times but fairly dark AM & tried to rain..

Down at 8.15, queue about 15yards long (when we finished breakfast it was right into the Enquiry Office in the hall!) In at 8.45. Cereal, lavish portion of bacon & bubble & squeak, bread etc.

10.0 off to **Buckingham Palace** to see **Changing of the Guard**, a large crowd there (many Yanks beside other countries), of course, all in khaki but large brass band & the usual red tape ceremony but very interesting with band playing most of the time; very smart. 11.0 picked up Mum who had been suiting in a park near by, & walked up **Constitution Hill** (crowds....) & to **Rotten Row** (can't imagine why that name) & saw quite a lot of riding, great black water pipe all along the side now. Sat down a while and moved on to Hyde Park when we saw the chair ticket man. Watched people rowing in the Serpentine & saw swans, ducks & ducklings, water hen & family. Crossed bridge, huge park and hard to imagine in the heart of London. To **Albert's Monument**, parts well made but too. too... sat there a while with **Albert Hall** in front. Looked at **Kensington Palace** very dull, and the lovely garden with the tree-covered wall. Caught bus to **Marble Arch** & naffed around cafes Dad didn't like the smell of. At last got tube to **Holborn** & bus to **Strand**. Coffee & tea cake.

PM Mum & I in bus to St Paul's, thro' main door, inside spoilt by massive brick shelter in an arch & scaffolding around altar & N. wing. To Tower [of London] some damage, not open. To Tower Bridge & watched unloading from Danish ship, swinging the staff on to wharf. Also some coalers which put funnels down. Mum talking to policeman who lives at Shooters Hill, & another large ship hooted, so bridge up, bells etc. took 7 mins. altogether, v[ery] interesting. Bomb damage worse around there.

Hotel 5.0, cup of tea. 6.15 St Martin's Church v[ery] dull, we were upstairs, short & sweet service. Hotel 7.45 dinner hors d'oeuvre, omelette, plums, small lagar awful stuff, had coffee to take flavour away. Orch[estra] & dancing lovely to watch.

### **MONDAY JULY 30, 1945**

Grey, fine drizzle AM, clear PM & sun.

Last day. Packed & to breakfast queue, in to breakfast in ½ hour at 8.15, had puffed wheat, herring, toast etc, I have tea, they have coffee. Finished packing so Dad & I caught **Covent Garden** underground to **King's Cross** & left our 3 bags there & found out about our train home [**Leeds**]. Caught underground again & on "Inner Circle" route to **Victoria**, made our way towards new **R.C. Cathedral** when Dad saw hat shop & popped in to see if there was a hat of his size, 64/5. & there was a bowler (what he usually wears except when he wears (broad-brimmed trilby). To Cathedral, unfinished; Eastern appearance from outside, marble pillars & walls (unfinished) inside. Some quite nice ornate chapels to saints at each side with tables of candles. Saw part of a service which almost continuously goes on, all sorts of walking to here & there by priest & back & Latin chanting. Money boxes every few yards made awful atmosphere. On tram (as drizzle & no coats) to **Chelsea bridge** & to **Tate gallery**, met Mum there but it was too badly damaged behind, though the front appears unscathed, to reopen, all pictures away. Caught bus to **Regent St.** & to **Liberty's**, really marvellous shop. Thro' **Dicken's & Jones** & bus to **Selfridge's** as crowd tremendous, all pavements seething with people & much traffic. Bus to Hotel for last time, in to lunch for hors d'oeuvres, lobster in bread crumbs, mashed potatoes, peas & thick gravy, creamy ice-cream, ginger beer, café noir. Left hotel. To **British Museum** but closed as bombed (not too badly), all stuff away.

Wondered what to do in last 2hrs; decided to go to **Harrods** & expected to see the remains only, but we went in & everything wonderful, plenty of goods of every description; walked thro' endless rooms of many good pianos, furniture (mostly good 2<sup>nd</sup> hand) etc.etc. Up escalator to top floor; Dad went up next & didn't see ""Staff only"!

**END of the diary of a sixteen-year-old from Leeds of his SECOND LONDON HOLIDAY, July 1945**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL ENDNOTES**

**Endnote 1:** This was the second London Hepper family holiday: the first one was in March 1937 with my parents and brother John (born 27 Feb. 1926), when scaffolding was being erected along The Mall for the coronation of **George VI** on 12 May.

**Endnote 2:** In 1945 the war in Europe had finished on VEDay 7 May; but hostilities in the Far East continued until VJDay 15 August.

**Endnote 3:** I usually began my diary entries from 1943 with weather notes. At home, 13 Weetwood Crescent, these often included my estimate of the Beaufort windscale and the barometer reading from our hall instrument.

**Endnote 4: The Samsons** were our family friends I had not met before.

**Endnote 5:** Five years later, on 12 December 1950, I was called up for two years National Service. I became a Pilot Officer and a Fighter Controller in Fighter Command at radar stations mainly in Norfolk and Shropshire; on demobilisation on 12 December 1952 I was obliged to join the RAF Voluntary Service for three years as the Cold War was on.

**Endnote 6: My brother John** who was a Lieut. in the Royal Engineers, was posted to India (Bombay Sappers and Miners) in 1943 until 1947 when India achieved independence.

**Endnote 7:** I would have been surprised to know that eventually some of my own living plant collections, as editor of the revised *Flora of West Tropical Africa* (Crown Agents, Vols. 2 & 3 1963-72), from the rainforests of Ghana, Ivory Coast and Cameroon would be growing in the Palm House and Conservatory. In Cameroon I led the Kew team designating and negotiating the huge Forest Nature Reserve from near the coast to the 4095m. summit of volcanic Mount Cameroon.

**Endnote 8:** In May 1982 **HM Queen Elizabeth II** reopened the refurbished Temperate House. At the ceremony I had the privilege of presenting her with a copy of the just-published *KEW: gardens for science and pleasure* (HMSO) which I edited for colleagues. In spite of the title she asked me what it was about; I said that it describes the work of Kew, and she said that it was difficult to know what goes on at Kew!

**Endnote 9:** Most of the material from this museum is now stored in the Banks Building which is not open to the general public. It includes Ancient Egyptian plant material from tombs and temples, which I studied for my *Pharaoh's Flowers: botanical treasures of Tutankhamun* (ed.1 HMSO 1990; ed. 2 KWC Publishers 2009).

**Endnote 10:** Perhaps a prophetic question as I did not imagine that I would spend the whole of my working life, 1950s-1990s, on the staff of Kew Herbarium.

**Endnote 11:** Since there was no television being broadcast in 1945, BBC Radio was the only source of information, except for cinema newsreels which were shown several days after the events. I was astonished that the famous **Winston Churchill** was voted out and the lesser known **Clement Attlee** voted in. **Stalin**, who was at the Potsdam Peace Conference, was surprised to see **Attlee** replace **Churchill** at the meeting.

**Endnote 12:** Sadly, Blackheath estate agents had disposed of the sites of several of her bombed houses for a song for temporary government housing.



**Endnote 13:** Mrs Lilian Andrews was a Leeds neighbour who lived in Weetwood Lane, Far Headingley, and the widow of the Principal of the Leeds College of Art who died about 1940.

**Endnote 14:** this was Teddington Lock at the head of the tidal part of the River Thames.

**Endnote 15:** This historic café was probably Newen's then in central Richmond; they were famous for their Maids of Honour, a sweet cheese tartlet. Food rationing, started in 1940, was still strictly maintained until well after the war. However, restaurant meals were always unrationed but depended on the availability of materials and queues.]

**Endnote 16:** "little ships" was the term for the private boats which rallied in June 1940 at **Churchill's** request to cross the English Channel to rescue our troops stranded on Dunkirk beach under aerial bombardment; many thousands were returned to UK. I remember it very clearly on the daily BBC news bulletins. I also mentioned the 'coal barges', which were vital at that time for the power stations, industry and private fires, but are seldom to be seen nowadays.

**Endnote 17: Doris Pailthorpe was** her cousin on her mother's side and she died in June 1981. She was a professional illustrator of children's books, and followed a family tradition as her relative, **Fred. W. Paithorpe**, who was illustrator to The Pickwick Club in 1882.

**Endnote 18: Joan Lovell** was related to Dad's Mother, my **Granny Hepper**. During WWI my mother was at St Felix boarding school, Southwold which was bombarded, with **Joan**. Her husband was my **Uncle Geoff Lovell** and they lived in Haywards Heath, Sussex. **Geoff** was a lawyer who managed the family's commercial greenhouses raising tomatoes and carnations, until about 1950s when the Dutch took over these trades, and acres of South Coast glass were left to rot. He was an accomplished pianist, and he actually made a clavichord and owned a harpsichord; he was an amateur weaver and made clothes for his daughter, **Ann** .

END of NOTES