

Enid Blyton

1897-1968

**Children's Author: Noddy, The Famous Five and The Secret Seven**

Lived at 83 Shortlands Road, Shortlands 1925 – 1929 (Blue Plaque)

Enid lived in Beckenham with her parents and younger brothers and received her early education at "Tresco", Cedars Road and Elm Road Baptist Church Sunday School. In 1907 she was enrolled at the Misses Shaw's St Christopher's School for Girls at 88 Croydon Road, Beckenham (which moved to 2 Rectory Road in 1908) until 1915. Enid was a "Day Girl" and became Head Girl in 1913. With her friends, she set up a magazine for which she wrote short stories. Enid's parents had separated in 1910 and her father had a further three children with his new partner. Her mother insisted that the children maintain the pretence that their father was simply away on a visit. Once she left home, Enid had little contact with either parent.

In 1916 she had secured a place at the Guildhall School of Music, but turned this down in favour of taking up a teacher-training course at Ipswich High School. Her first teaching job was at Bickley Park Boys Preparatory School in 1918. A year later she became governess to four brothers in Surbiton, Surrey, where other children also attended her "experimental school" over a period of four years.

In 1924 she married Hugh Alexander Pollock at Bromley Register Office. They met through publishers George Newnes, where Hugh was an editor, when she was commissioned to write a children's book. The couple lived in Chelsea before moving to the newly built "Elfin Cottage" in Shortlands Road. Enid was now having great success as a children's author. In 1925 she sold her first full length book "The Enid Blyton Book of Bunnies" and in 1926 she began writing and editing a fortnightly magazine, "Sunny Stories for Little Folks".

Two changes in the area around "Elfin Cottage" in the late 1920s lead to Enid leaving the area where she had lived for most of her life: Proposals to create a bypass for Bromley Town via Shortlands Road and Hayes Road; and the development of the Langley Estate as small residential housing plots, now called "Park Langley". Enid had always enjoyed the rural nature of the area and these "improvements" were not welcome.

The couple moved to a thatched house, a former inn, near the Thames at Bourne End, Buckinghamshire, another "fairy tale" house with links to the highwayman Dick Turpin, which appealed to Enid's imagination.

Enid and Hugh had two daughters, born in 1931 and 1935. They divorced in 1942. Both remarried and Enid continued to write and was the bestselling children's author of the 1950s and 1960s. After a suspected heart attack in the late 1950s, Enid's physical and mental health slowly deteriorated and she died in 1968 aged 71. She is buried at Golders Green Crematorium.

Harold Sydney Bride
1890 – 1956



Marconi Telegraphy Operator, RMS Titanic 1912

Lived at 58 Ravensbourne Avenue, Shortlands 1903 – 1922 (Blue Plaque)

Educated at Beckenham Technical School from 1901 where he learned to swim at the new Beckenham Baths. Aged 14, he studied at the British School of Telegraphy before joining the Marconi International Marine Company in 1905.

In 1912 he was Marconi's second radio officer aboard RMS Titanic. The main task of the two radio officers was to handle messages for 1st Class passengers. Marine traffic and weather reports were dealt with by the same telegraphers, who worked alternating 6-hour shifts covering each 24-hour period between them.

When the Titanic struck the iceberg the first radio operator, John George Phillips, was busy with a backlog of passengers' messages and unaware of the seriousness of the collision, Harold was preparing to relieve him when the captain told them to prepare to send the distress call on his command. Bride recalled: *"... there was not the least thing to indicate that there was any trouble. The wireless was working perfectly."*

The captain returned and gave the order and Phillips began to send CQD, the regulation international call for help. *"All of us made light of the disaster. [...] Then the captain came back. 'What are you sending?' he asked. 'CQD' Phillips replied."* Still not fully understanding, Harold recalled: *"The humour of the situation appealed to me. I cut in with a little remark that made us all laugh, including the captain. 'Send SOS,' I said. 'It's the new call, and it may be your last chance to send it.'"*

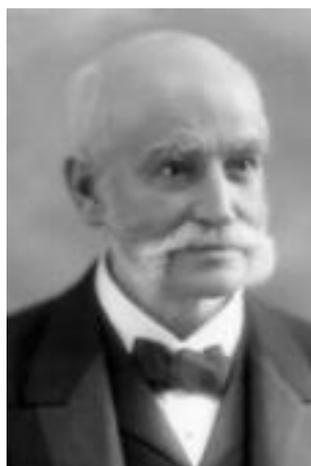
Harold Cottam, RMS Carpathia's sole radio operator, recalled the message was: *"Come at once. We have struck a berg. It's a CQD, old man."* On asking if it was serious, the reply was: *"Yes it's a CQD old man. Here's the position, report it, and get here as soon as you can."*

Phillips and Bride were released from duty, but continued transmitting until water washed into the radio room. Both managed to reach an upturned life raft but Phillips died of hypothermia before they were picked up by the Carpathia. Despite suffering from severe cold and injuries to his feet, Bride worked with Cottam, a friend from the British School of Telegraphy, to relay the survivors' names to New York. After hospital treatment, Bride gave evidence at both the American and British inquiries into the sinking. Back in Beckenham, his appearance at the Croydon Road Recreation Ground was reported in the Beckenham Journal: *"He was received with great cheering ... Mr Bride asked them to be good enough to excuse him from making a speech, as he had had a very trying day in the court of enquiry."*

"As Mr Bride left the bandstand many thronged around him eager to shake his hand, and then a body of his old school fellows of the Beckenham Secondary School got hold of him and carried him amidst cheers around the ground." He continued to work as a Marconi radio operator and served during WW1 aboard the SS Mona's Isle.

Harold married in 1920 and moved to Scotland in 1922 where he was a salesman for Fassett & Johnston Ltd. pharmaceutical company for 25 years then a caretaker for the National Trust of Scotland at Provan Hall, Glasgow. He died in 1956 and his ashes were scattered at Glasgow Crematorium.

Thomas Charles Dewey
1840 – 1926



1st Baronet Dewey, of South Hill Wood, 1917

Lived at 1, South Hill Road, Shortlands 1887 – 1926 (Blue Plaque)

Born in Cheshunt, Herts in 1840, the son of a tea grocer, Thomas entered the Prudential Assurance Company as a junior clerk at the age of 17. He moved to lodgings in Freeland Road, Bromley where he met and married the companion of the lady of the house in 1866. The couple and their children lived in the town until 1887, when they moved into their newly built house, "South Hill Wood", set in extensive grounds at the boundary between Bromley and Shortlands. Thomas had gained promotions at the Prudential and by 1873 he was manager of the industrial branch. By 1904 he was general manager and three years later, became director and deputy chairman. After another three years he was appointed chairman after 53 years with the company.

Thomas, with Eley Soames of Mason's Hill, purchased land on Westmoreland Road for the new St Mark's Church in 1896. With Thomas's generous support, the church raised funds to complete the building, which was needed to accommodate the growing congregation that had far outstripped the Parish Church of SS Peter and Paul. The first services were held in 1898. However, the tower was not completed until 1903. The church was devastated during the blitz of 1941 and only the tower survived intact. The current church is a reconstruction using the remnants of the original by Evelyn Hellicar (architect son of Revd Hellicar, who also designed Valley School and The Parish Rooms, Shortlands) and repairs and reconstruction by T. W. G. Grant in 1952-53. When Bromley became a borough in 1903, Thomas served as Charter Mayor until the first elected mayor took office the following year, an honour that Thomas had declined. However, he was the first Freeman of the Borough of Bromley in 1904 and laid the foundation stone of the new Town Hall in 1907.

During WW1 Thomas served on the Cabinet War Office Expenditure Committee and at his instigation several senior officers of the Prudential Assurance Company were loaned to Government. The cost of their employment was met by the company for the duration. At home, Thomas turned his garden music pavilion over to the VAD for a hospital, where Belgian troops were nursed on return from the battlefields. This service was rewarded when Thomas received the *Medaille du Roi Albert* from the King of Belgium. The hospital later treated British servicemen and Thomas's holiday home in Devon was also converted to a VAD hospital. In 1917 Thomas was knighted, becoming 1st Baronet Dewey of South Hill Wood in recognition of his service during WW1.

Thomas was still active at the Prudential, which under his leadership could boast that it held 1 in 3 policies held by the British public and at the age of 80 he was elected President of the company. In addition to his professional activities he was a keen supporter of local charities and organisations. He supported Bromley Cottage Hospital, music and sports societies (many of which are still thriving in the 21st century) and set up the Bromley School of Science and Art in Tweedy Road. Thomas died in Devon in 1926. He is buried in the churchyard of St Luke's, Bromley Common.

Thomas's house is now divided into flats and, of the original grounds, an 11-acre park of ancient woods, shrubbery and formal planting was reserved for use by the public by Beckenham Borough Council in 1959. The music pavilion, designed by Hellicar and used by the VAD, has disappeared.

Charles William James
Keeping
 1924 – 1988



English illustrator, children's book author, illustrator and lithographer

Lived at Church Road, Shortlands 1960-1988 (Blue Plaque)

Born in Lambeth, the young Charles wrote stories and drew with his sister on surplus newsstand placards. His father died, aged 40, when Charles was 10 during his schooling at Frank Bryant School for Boys which he had to leave when he was 13. At 14, Charles took a correspondence course in art paid for by his aunt and granny, who lived with him in the family home. He also started work at William Clowes & Sons, delivering paper to the printers by horse and cart with driver Tom Cherry. His subject matter often returned to scenes from his early life and Tom and his horse and cart are often seen in Charles' illustrations. At the outbreak of war, he briefly worked at Durrants Munitions before serving as a Royal Navy Radio Officer from 1942. On demobilisation, he worked for the Gaslight and Coke Company emptying pennies from household gas meters, counting them and completing the receipt forms, a source of many sharply observed stories and characters. He studied art at evening classes until he received a grant to study at the Regent Street Polytechnic between 1949 and 1952, specialising in illustration and lithography. Here he met **Renate Meyer**, a fellow art student. They married in 1952, moved to Shortlands in 1960 and remained there, raising their four children and numerous pets, including a horse, donkey, goats, sheep and chickens.

On graduation, Charles lectured one day a week at the Regent Street Polytechnic until 1963 when he became a visiting lecturer in illustration at Croydon College. From 1952 he worked freelance, initially producing a cartoon strip for the Daily Herald newspaper and was also commissioned to illustrate text books. In 1956 he illustrated books published by the Oxford University Press producing innovative, vibrant illustrations across double pages and in the margins. His illustrations introduced children to Roman Britain, classical Greece, and Norse legends in books by Rosemary Sutcliffe, Henry Treece, Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen.

The advent of full colour press in the mid-1960s offered new opportunities and Charles published his own illustrated children's books with themes from his childhood in London and the disappearance of communities in terraced housing as families were moved to high rise blocks. In 1964 The Folio Society commissioned 12 illustrations for *Wuthering Heights* and several other commissions before Charles undertook the illustrations for the complete works of Charles Dickens from 1978 to 1988. In 1978 only line drawings could be reproduced and, although full colour printing became available during the project, Charles maintained the original style throughout. In the 1980s he was Visiting Lecturer in Lithography at Croydon College and lectured at Camberwell College of Art. At this time Oxford University Press commissioned illustrations in pen and ink and wash for older teens, including *Beowulf* and Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*. He also illustrated the classics printed by Heron Books. Throughout his career, Charles won prestigious prizes for his illustrations and writing, including the Hans Christian Andersen Award, Kate Greenaway Medal and the W H Smith Illustration Award. He was "arguably one of the most innovative and creatively ambitious illustrators of all time" (Salisbury & Styles 2012)

After Charles' death in 1988, Renate devised The Keeping Gallery* at their home with galleries to display their work and studio space for teaching.

*Viewing by appointment only

Please see www.thekeepinggallery.co.uk or [officialkeepinggallery](#) on Instagram

Renate (Meyer)

Keeping

1930 – 2014

**Artist, writer and teacher**

Lived at Church Road, Shortlands 1960 -2014 (Blue Plaque)

(Hannah) Renate Meyer was born in Berlin, where her father was a doctor. The family moved to London in 1933, but Renate returned to her grandparents in Germany to recuperate from an illness, as her grandfather was a professor of paediatrics who patented the first baby milk powder. On returning to London in 1934 she attended a French speaking school in London before attending the local Hampstead school. Renate was nine when WW2 broke out. With her family naturalised in 1938, her father served in the British army in North Africa for six years and she was for a time evacuated to the country, which she hated. The country life, the school and the food were all completely different to her experience of home. When she returned, she spent hours with her mother making rhyming story books written by her mother and illustrated by Renate. Her father returned in 1946 when she was 16. In 1947 the family visited relatives in what was then Palestine. Renate was enthralled by the kibbutz community which she emulated in her own family home, welcoming members of the extended family.

Soon Renate persuaded her parents to allow her to study art at Regent Street Polytechnic, promising that she would not fall in love with a “penniless artist”. There she met her future husband, **Charles Keeping**, a fellow art student, who had served in the Royal Navy during the war. They married in 1952 and moved to Shortlands in 1960 where they raised four children and shared the house with Charles’ mum, sister and her family.

Both Renate and Charles were fulltime artists working from their separate rooms in the house. Renate worked in a wide range of media including paint, textiles, thread and text. As Renate Meyer she produced children’s wordless picture stories including “Vicki” and “Hide and Seek”. In addition to her own children’s books and stories, she also illustrated other authors’ work, such as “The Bird Fancier” by Helen Cresswell. She was also a teacher with Bromley Adult Education for some 30 years.

After Charles’ death in 1988, Renate continued to work but was deeply affected by Charles’ absence in the house where they had lived and worked together for almost 30 years. Renate devised a plan to create The Keeping Gallery in the family home, as a permanent exhibition space to display her own and Charles’ work together saying: “if we could no longer be together at least our work could.” She opened the gallery to school groups and other interested visitors and continued to create and teach in the studio. She personally guided visitors around the exhibits and ended each visit with refreshments overlooking her garden. Renate spent much of her time, after her children had left school, producing themed sets of work in different media, such as *The Life Cycle of an Apple* and her series of amazingly lifelike and tempting plates of cakes, rendered in paint and textiles. She also produced a stitched frieze to tell her life story which is also on display. At first glance it seems to be a collection of packets, wrappers and newsprint. However, closer inspection reveals her life story from her earliest memories, family stories, wartime evacuation, art school, marriage and motherhood. Each piece reveals the “printing” as handstitched words and collages in fabric and thread.

Renate died in 2014 but the Keeping Gallery continues to share the couple’s work and vision to inspire visiting groups of all ages.

*Viewing by appointment only.

Please see www.thekeepinggallery.co.uk or [officialkeepinggallery](#) on Instagram

Alexander Muirhead
1848 – 1920



BSc, DSc, FRS, Electrical Engineer specialising in cable & wireless telegraphy

Lived at 20 Church Road, Shortlands 1893 – 1920 (Blue Plaque)

Born in East Lothian, his farmer father moved the family to London to join the Electric Telegraph Company as a superintendent. Alexander was partially deaf after a childhood head injury, which led his parents to believe, incorrectly, that he had a learning disability. He had a private tutor and spent hours making up experiments. From 1863 he studied University College School where he won prizes in mathematics and the sciences. He graduated BSc (Hons) in chemistry from University College, London in 1869 and went on to gain his DSc in Electricity at St Bartholomew's in 1872, where he is credited with taking the world's first ECG by attaching wires to a patient's wrist to record the heartbeat. He started his working life as scientific adviser with his father's firm of telegraph engineers working with his father, brother John, Josiah Latimer Clark and W. M. Warden. This group worked on the simultaneous transmitting and receiving of telegraph messages (Duplexing), which had previously been thought impossible. By 1875 Alexander was the acknowledged world expert and patented "Muirhead's Duplex System" with H. A. Taylor. Alexander also pioneered the original electrical standards of capacity using precision machines produced by the firm. Alexander and his brother were directors of Latimer Clark, Muirhead & Co. but Alexander also started an independent consultancy in 1882.

Muirhead & Co. was Alexander's own business which he was encouraged to open by the cable telegraph companies after his father's death. Originally in London, the manufactory moved to Elmers End in Beckenham in 1896. In 1893, Alexander married and moved to "The Lodge", 20 Church Road, Shortlands. At about this time he began his collaboration with physicist Sir Oliver Lodge on the development of "wireless" communication (which may explain the house name). Lodge and Muirhead demonstrated their apparatus in Oxford in 1894 (before Marconi's more fêted demonstration), they formed the "Lodge-Muirhead Wireless Syndicate" in 1901, a move that put them in direct competition with Marconi. In 1902 their wireless system was proved to work between South Stack land station on Anglesey, North Wales and the SS Veedamore to a distance of 36 miles. By 1903 their system was being tested by The War Office for military use and in 1904 the Midland Railway Company was installing a land station to allow message transmission between their station masters and the new non-stop long-distance trains, it was even envisaged that the travelling businessman could keep in touch with his office by "ethereal conversation". In 1904 he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society.

Lodge-Muirhead was bought out by Marconi in 1911 following a legal action by Muirhead for non-payment of fees for Marconi's use of their patented terminal apparatus.

Alexander suffered a small stroke in 1909, at which time he stepped back a little from the daily running of his businesses but not from his continued interest in all things connected with communication technology. He died at home in December 1920 following a heart attack and is buried at Norwood cemetery.

Dinah Maria Craik
1826 – 1887



English Poet and Novelist: John Halifax Gentleman

Lived at Corner House, 114, Shortlands Road, Shortlands 1870 – 1887

Born Dinah Maria Mulock in Stoke-on-Trent and raised in Newcastle-under-Lyme, she was the daughter of a non-conformist minister. At the age of 12 she was writing stories and helping her mother at their private school in Newcastle. After her mother's death in 1845, her father abandoned the family and Dinah earned her living writing 5,000-word stories which she sold to magazines, journals and annuals every 2-3 weeks. She inherited her portion of her late mother's estate in 1847 when she was 21.

Her best remembered work, "John Halifax Gentleman", was published in 1856. In the 1860s she turned her attention to writing essays on social causes and was awarded an annual pension of £60 from the Civil List for Services to Literature. She married accountant George Lillie Craik in 1865. They met when he convalesced at Dinah's home following a serious injury in a train accident. He was 11 years Dinah's junior and was later a partner in Macmillan & Company publishers. Their adopted daughter, Dorothy, had been found abandoned as an infant on New Year's Day 1869 near Beckenham's alms houses in St George's Road and was taken to the workhouse. Miss Wilkinson of Shortlands House and Dinah pledged to look after the baby pending police enquiries to find the parents. When there was no response, Dorothy was christened at St Mary's Church Shortlands and raised by Dinah and George.

The architect, Norman Shaw designed Corner House and on its completion in 1869 the family moved in. Dinah's earnings from her writing paid for the new house. Her death in 1887 at Corner House occurred shortly before Dorothy's wedding. Dinah was buried at Keston Church "in the presence of several hundred spectators". Memorials were erected in St Mary's Church (now lost) and Tewkesbury Abbey (sponsors included Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning and Sir John E Millais). The lodge/stable of Corner House survives as Shortlands library.

Applications to place a blue plaque at Corner House have been refused on the grounds that Mrs Craik did not write her most notable works while living here.

George Grote
(1794 – 1871)



Classical Historian, Liberal MP and Author of History of Greece (12 Volumes)

Lived at Shortlands House, Bromley Road, Shortlands 1794 – 1820

Born at Shortlands House, Clay Hill (now called Shortlands) in 1794, George was the grandson of the founder of the bank Grote, Prescott & Company at Threadneedle Street and eldest of the 11 children of George senior, the High Sherriff of Kent. He was educated at home by his mother before attending Sevenoaks Grammar School in 1800 and five years later, aged 10, he attended Charterhouse School, Surrey until 1810. Although he was a good student his father decided that he should not go to university and put him to work at the family banking house. George continued his studies in his own time mastering French, German and Italian and his life-long passions of history, classics, philosophy and political economy.

In 1820 he married Harriet Lewin, a biographer and writer. They had met some five years previously but any romance foundered when George was told a false rumour of her engagement to another suitor. When they met again in 1818 George's father forbade the marriage, finally they married by licence without their fathers' consent at Bexley.

The couple moved to a house adjoining the bank in Hampstead where George worked at the bank and wrote about the reform of British politics publishing several influential articles in support of votes by ballot (until then votes were cast publicly) and changes to the term of each parliament. He was also interested in the philosophies of the Utilitarian Society, which advocated political reform to benefit society as a whole and was a member of the Political Economy Club founded by the political economist David Ricardo (brother-in-law of W. A. Wilkinson, a later owner of Shortlands House).

In 1822 he began to write his great work in 12 volumes "*A History of Greece: From the Time of Solon to 403 BC*". Shortlands House was sold in 1828 after his father suffered a stroke.

In 1830 George became the manager of the bank and two years later he was elected Liberal MP for the City of London Constituency from 1833 to 1841. In 1842 he cut his ties to the bank and returned to the study of history, publishing his *History of Greece* over 10 years from 1846.

He became a fellow of the Royal Society, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London and a trustee of the British Museum. He was offered a peerage in 1869, but declined the honour.

George died in 1871 and is buried in the south transept of Westminster Abbey.

William Edward
MacAndrew
(1833-1905)



©Richard MacAndrew

Merchant, shipowner and Lloyds Underwriter

Lived at Shortlands House, Bromley Road, Shortlands 1874 - 1880

Born in 1833 in Liverpool into a family of merchants shipping fruit and other goods from Spain as “MacAndrews & Co” and “Acebal & Co”. He was a successful merchant and in 1863 and 1865 he owned new Tyne-built iron hulled cargo ships “Smyrna” and “Sardis”. In 1872 he became a stockbroker and Lloyd’s underwriter. He married in 1861 (in the same year, his brother married his wife’s sister before settling at Wickham House in West Wickham) there were eight children, two were baptised at St Mary’s Church in 1876 and 1879.

In 1873, after the death of his father, he purchased the Shortlands House estate and set about extending and improving the Queen Anne house with architect Ernest George RA. Rooms were added to the rear for a spacious dining room with bedrooms and dressing rooms above and a grand teak staircase with stained-glass windows in the Arts and Crafts style installed above to let light into the stairwell. This extension proudly bears the date “1875” and his initials “WEMA” picked out in black on the eaves. There was also a magnificent 61-foot (20 metre) glass conservatory. The building costs were estimated to have been £10,000.

Five years later William’s fortunes changed dramatically. In 1880 he sold all his live and deadstock, farm machinery, 200 dozen plants and garden implements, his personal coaches and horse harness. The house contents followed in 1881, including all moveable furniture, carpets, pictures, piano, china, glass and the contents of the wine cellar. William kept the freehold of the estate. The family moved out and leased the unfurnished 14-bedroom house, gardens and farmland to Sir Stevenson Blackwood, the newly appointed Secretary of the Post Office and his wife, Harriet, Dowager Duchess of Manchester.

In 1887 William was declared bankrupt. The American stock market crash of December 1886 left him with £100,000 losses and unable to repay his creditors who were owed almost £73,000. They received payment of 1½d in the pound (0.625%). He petitioned to be discharged but this was rejected and the discharge suspended until 1892. Now William had no choice but to sell the freehold of the Shortlands House estate, which he did in 1888.

Probate records show that on his death in 1905, William’s estate was valued at just £11 11s 11d (£11.59).

Josiah Charles **Stamp**
1880 – 1941



1st Baron Stamp, GCB, GBE, FBA - Economist, Civil servant and banker

Lived at Tantallon, Park Hill Road, Shortlands 1923–1941 (house destroyed)

Born in Hampstead, Josiah attended Bethany School, Goudhurst before joining the civil service Inland Revenue Dept. as a 16-year-old boy clerk in 1896. He met his future wife the following year, but the couple continued with their individual studies, eventually marrying in 1903. They had four sons. Within the next ten years Josiah had risen to the post of Inspector of Taxes in London and was studying economics as an external student of University of London, gaining his first-class degree in 1911 followed by his doctorate from the London School of Economics in 1916. He received the CBE in 1918 before leaving the civil service in 1919 to become secretary and director of Nobel Industries Ltd (which became ICI). He was invested KBE in 1920 and FGE in 1924.

From 1919 onwards he served on many public committees, commissions and boards, which valued his economic, financial and statistical expertise. He was credited with “Stamp's Law” which acknowledged governments’ love of amassing and manipulating statistical data which had ultimately been collected by a lowly civil servant “who just puts down what he damn pleases.”

The family moved to Shortlands in 1923. In 1926 he became chairman of the London Midland and Scottish Railway and in 1928 he was appointed a director of the Bank of England. From 1927 until his death, he was a Colonel of the British army, commanding the Royal Engineers Railway and Transport Corps.

When Beckenham became an Urban Borough in 1935 Josiah was the first mayor and an Honorary Freeman of the Borough the following year. In 1936 he was invested Knight Grand Cross of the Bath (GCB) before his elevation to the peerage in 1938 as Baron Stamp of Shortlands.

Against advice, Josiah refused to move from his home during the Blitz. On 16th April 1941 the air raid shelter at Tantallon received a direct hit killing Josiah, his wife, Olive, and his eldest son, Wilfred aged 36, and their servants Betty Wark aged 16 and Violet Baldock aged 39. The only survivor was a maid. The simultaneous death of Josiah and his heir meant that his family paid double death duties under survivorship law. The baronetcy passed to his second son, Trevor, 3rd Baron Stamp of Shortlands.

The family are buried together at Beckenham Cemetery at Elmers End.

William Arthur
Wilkinson
(1795-1865)



Railway magnate, first Chairman of London Underground railway and Liberal MP
Lived at Shortlands House, Bromley Road, Shortlands 1848 - 1865

Born in Eastcheap, London to Josiah Wilkinson, a surgeon, William's early life is a mystery. His birth was registered at a Quaker meeting with witnesses to his birth but annotated "Parents not in Membership". In 1818 married Rachel Ricardo, daughter of the Dutch-born stockbroker Joseph Ricardo, at St John's church, Hackney. The couple had four children. Esther died in 1823. In 1826 William married her sister, Rachel Ricardo, and they had one child. Rachel died in 1851 and is buried in Beckenham.

The 1851 census shows William at Shortlands House, a magistrate for Surrey and a dealer in British and foreign Stocks and Shares. By 1856 he was trustee and chairman of the British Land Company, an early building society with the aim of enabling more British men to buy homes and, therefore, to be able to vote. The company bought freehold land and divided it into smaller plots, which were advertised for sale in "The Freeholder's Circular".

While resident in Shortlands, William built cottages for his farm labourers and employed a farm bailiff. He was Chairman of The Metropolitan Railway and involved with the West End and Crystal Palace Railway Company. The original terminus "Bromley Station" now Shortlands Station was opened within his estate boundary in 1858. The railway prompted William to sell his 160-acre estate of farmland and ancient timber as the proposed railway would link Shortlands to the fashionable Crystal Palace at Penge Common, only four miles away. He cleared Kingswood (the foresters were housed in the cottage at the corner of Kingswood Road and Hayes Road) and laid out Shortlands Road, Kingswood Road and Valley Road and side roads making plots of between a half and five acres (later 13-acre plots were offered) for "Gentlemen's Residences" and "Villas".

Shortlands was "the first estate which has been brought into the market for sale with a Registered and Indefeasible Title under the new [Land Registry] Act" It also boasted the convenience of gas lighting, hygienic sewers and "pure" water pumped from the new pumping station.

William died at Shortlands in 1865 and left funds in his will to build a new church on the high ground at Kingswood Road near the centre of the estate lands. The gothic style church was built of Kentish Ragstone with a bell tower and a lych gate and opened its registers in 1870 as a daughter church to St George's, Beckenham. The vicarage was built beside the church in Kingswood Road, its first incumbent was Rev. Woolley. William is buried at Southwark.

His family remained at Shortlands House until 1873.

As a ghoulish footnote, William and his father were the owners of an embalmed head in a mahogany casket, said to be that of Oliver Cromwell. Williams' father had been given the head by his patients, the nieces of a former owner, himself the descendant of a Westminster Hall sentry who, the story goes, had picked up the head when it had been dislodged from the building. The head was sold after William's death and was reinterred by a subsequent owner.

Local History Resources

If you are interested in finding out more about Shortlands there are many resources available.

Bromley Library	Local Studies and Historic Collections * 2 nd Floor, Bromley Central Library	Tel: 020 3931 0907
Shortlands Library	Local Interest shelves * 110 Shortlands Road	Tel: 020 8460 9692
The Keeping Gallery	Church Road	www.thekeepinggallery.co.uk
Historic photos		www.boroughphotos.org/bromley
BBLHS	Bromley Borough Local History Society	www.bblhs.org.uk
SRA	Shortlands Residents' Association	www.shortlandsra.org.uk
Shortlands Life	Facebook page for local people by local people	
Beckenham History Society		www.beckenhamhistory.co.uk
Kent Archaeological Society		www.kentarchaeology.org.uk

Books & Articles	"Shortlands" Len Hevey 1992
	"The Early History of Beckenham" Len Hevey 1994
	"Shortlands House and Estate 14 th -21 st Century" K M Baldwin (online) 2020
	"Shortlands in Old Picture Postcards" Muriel Searle 1992
	"Dictionary of National Biography, Volumes 1-22" 1921

* Find Shortlands History Books in Bromley Libraries on shelf number 942

942.1 = History of Greater London

942.2 = History of Kent

