

Pork pie hats and Buckingham Palace Gardens

In 1939 the Board of Control Headquarters moved from Northumberland Avenue (where I had joined it in 1937 straight from school at Wembley). The move was within central London and was to Hobart House, Grosvenor Place. The Hobart House building was just outside the wall of the back garden of Buckingham Palace. (One of the things Dorothy and I did when we were invited to our first Buckingham Palace Garden Party after the War was to walk in the gardens until we reached the other side of the wall.)

Hobart House was a four-storey building with a flat roof. On this roof my friend John Stevens (a fellow Clerical Officer at the Board) would on sunny summer days join me to eat our sandwiches. It was an era when young men cut a fancy figure by wearing pork pie hats (they were like trilby hats but circular). When the spirit took us we would take it in turns to give our hat to each other, then go down to the ground floor, go outside on to the pavement, and when the one on the roof sent the others pork pie hat spinning towards the ground the one below would do his best to catch the hat on his head, at the same time avoiding being run over by passing buses, cars and taxis. And of course we had to watch carefully to ensure the hat did not go over the wall into the King's back garden. We were both members of the Territorial Army and we reasoned that it would have been treason to throw clothes into the Palace Garden.

Happily all went smoothly for us and when we were called up for Army service on the 1st of September Steve and I were able to join our respective Units and had not been impounded in the Tower of London.