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TOMORROW'S DAILY EXPRESS**

Forces pension war

WAR veterans facing life on the breadline in old age are to march on Downing Street, writes David Paul. They say they were "cheated" out of a forces pension after a "secret" MoD ruling 35 years ago. Defence chiefs decided then that those who retired before April 5, 1975, with less than 22 years service (16 years for officers) would not receive a forces pension. The Equality for Veterans Association claims 600,000 "forgotten" personnel were not told that if they served just a few weeks longer they could enjoy a pension for life. Others were "culled" before becoming eligible. To sign the veterans' petition, which already has 300,000 signatures, go to www.efva.co.uk. The march will take place on March 8.

Discord at the Proms

A PROMS performance by the National Youth Orchestra was in doubt after a row between the conductor and the organisers, writes Jon Coates. Guest conductor Vladimir Jurowski threatened to pull out when he was offered a 40-minute slot for the orchestra's rendition of Romeo And Juliet instead of the 50 minutes he wanted. This alarmed the management of the NYO, which needs the television coverage given by the Proms to attract funding, vital at a time cash for the arts is being cut. After frantic negotiations, harmony was restored when the full 50 minutes was allowed for the performance at the Albert Hall on August 6.

Life inside the virgins' retreat

JANE CLINTON goes back in time to the Fifties when hundreds of Bourne & Hollingsworth shop girls lived, and loved, by the rules in a hostel with an art deco pool

A GIRL rushes down a steamy corridor joining a very long queue for the bathroom. There is laughter and chatter, gossip and banter amid the frantic hair-drying and preening. These women are shop employees and live in the company hostel. They share rooms and bathrooms and live life according to strict rules.

The year is 1954 and these scenes are taken from the charming film *The Crowded Day* which starred Richard Wattiss, Thora Hird, Dora Bryan, and a very young Prunella Scales and Sid James.

Yet this is not merely the stuff of fiction but the story of how many of the single employees of the London department store Bourne & Hollingsworth really lived. Indeed *The Crowded Day*, which was produced by Adelphi Films and directed by John Guillermin, used interior and exterior shots of the store.

"People called it a hostel but really Warwickshire House on Gower Street, where we stayed, was like a five-star hotel," says Mary Louch, 79, who was a secretary to the catering manager at Bourne & Hollingsworth from 1949 until 1953 when she married.

"There was a ballroom, an art deco swimming pool, a snack bar, a writing room and a sick bay where a Harley Street doctor would attend if people had overindulged in gin and pep'. We even had maid service for our evening meals, which would always include dessert. Considering there was still rationing, we ate very well. Looking back, it was quite an amazing place."

It is thought Warwickshire House, which was cheekily nicknamed "the virgins' retreat", was home to 600 women although others believe it was closer to 1,000.

While details are sketchy, Mary recalls there was never a dull moment and it is only in recent years that she realises just how special a time it was.

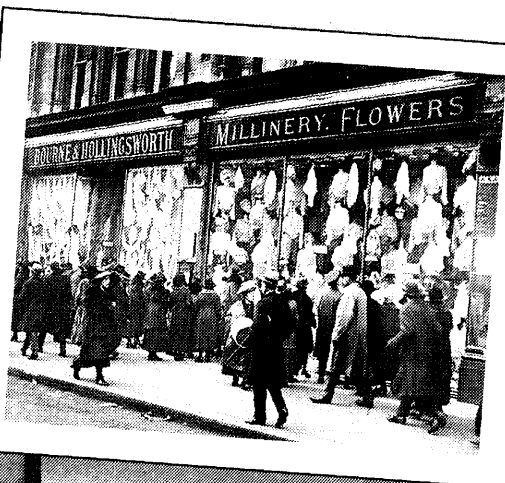
"It was a social whirl and it is only looking back that I have realised how lucky we were," she says from her home near Norwich. "Sometimes there would be free tickets to see shows, I remember going to the first night of T S Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*."

Life really picked up, however, when she eventually shared room 543 with Joy Mathers, who initially worked in the gown department and then went on to the lace department. The pair became firm friends and remain so to this day, as do several of the former employees. Indeed, Joy was Mary's bridesmaid.

"We did have tremendous fun," says Joy. "If we were in of an evening it was very rare and we would think something must be amiss. There was always some social activity somewhere. There would be summer and Christmas balls in the ballroom at Warwickshire House and I remember going to dances at Trenchard House, the police hostel in Soho."

It was at just such a dance that Joy met her husband Peter, a policeman. (Coincidentally, Mary also married a policeman.)

Life as an employee of Bourne & Hollingsworth was not all play, however, and there were rules which reflected the mores of the day. "If you worked on the shop floor you had to wear a black dress," recalls Joy,



CAPTURED ON FILM: *The Crowded Day* starred Richard Wattiss with, left to right, Thora Hird, Prunella Scales and Freda Jackson. Above, the outside of the store

wife Phyllis, now 84, who worked as a housekeeper there and they married in 1952. The couple now live in Bournemouth. "I joined in 1949 and stayed until 1965 and really did enjoy working there," says Geoffrey. "I had been in the army so I was used to rules. I had to wear a starched double-fronted white shirt and there could be no creases. I realised there were too many family members for me to ever get any more promotion so I moved to Debenhams."

BOURNE & HOLLINGSWORTH opened its doors in 1902 at 116-118 Oxford Street. It was founded by Walter W Bourne and Howard Hollingsworth. There had previously been a store in Westbourne Grove in West London but Walter and Howard wanted to expand and saw Oxford Street as the perfect site. As business thrived the pair bought and rebuilt the entire block, which at the time was said to include a brothel, some Polish tailors and Savory's cigarette factory.

The elegant and imposing site, designed by Slater and Moberly, covered 325,000 square feet and rapidly gained a reputation as a top class store. By the mid-Twenties it had established itself as the place to go for exquisite service and quality goods which ranged from ribbons to cat food.

Staff were told, "never exaggerate the quality of goods" and these words were printed in gold leaf on the cash books.

Bourne & Hollingsworth closed its doors for the last time in 1983 and it is now the site of the Plaza shopping centre. Warwickshire House is now used by University College London Hospitals for staff accommodation.

Those who worked there in the store's heyday, including Geoffrey, are saddened by what it has become.

"It is such a shame, Bourne & Hollingsworth was a really beautiful store," he says. "People knew about the things they were selling, they knew their job and they took great pride in it."

As for Mary Louch, she too prefers to remember Bourne & Hollingsworth as it once was.

"So many of us have such happy memories of the place that I do not really want to dwell on what has happened to it. For us it was a place where we seemed to have endless fun."

● *The Crowded Day*, from the British Film Institute's *The Adelphi Collection DVD/Blu-ray series is out now. Call 020 7815 1350 or visit bfi.org.uk/filmstore*

79, who was originally from Wiltshire and now lives in Shepperton with Peter, 80. "The men wore black jackets and black trousers with silver stripes. You had to look immaculate."

IT WAS very strict and there were clear rules on how to behave. You had to clock in on time and have breakfast at the store. If you were late that would count against you. In the evenings, if you were under 18 you had to be back at Warwickshire House by 11pm and if you were over 18 you had to be in by midnight. Woe betide anyone who broke the rules.

"We had a warden called Miss Nichols and everyone was terrified of her. If you had misbehaved there would be a message on the notice board asking you to see her and that was never a nice experience."

"We were told by the company: 'We employ ladies, we treat you like ladies and we expect you to behave like ladies.' Certain behaviour would mean instant dismissal, like pregnancy out



BEST OF FRIENDS: Mary Louch, above and pictured far left with Joy Mathers in 1951, has many happy memories of working at Bourne & Hollingsworth

of wedlock. It was a very different time and we were brought up not to sleep around. Sometimes a girl would be dismissed but mostly we were all terrified of those in charge."

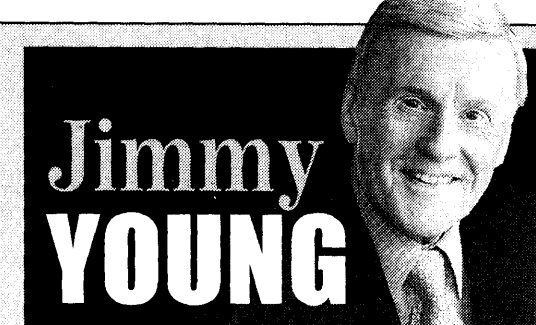
Such themes, as well as the romantic lives of the girls, are tackled in *The Crowded Day*, the tagline of which boasts: "A story of shopgirls and their men!"

While the pay was not hugely generous for the likes of Joy and Mary, they admit that somehow they just got by.

"I think I was paid about 16 shillings [80p] and it seemed two days after I was paid I was broke but we were lucky as we didn't have to pay for food, board, bills or hot water so it worked out fine really," says Joy.

"We had big washing machines at Warwickshire House where we washed our clothes and then we would give our laundry to a lady to dry them but we didn't have to do much domestic stuff. In fact, when I moved out after I married it took a while to get used to cooking and cleaning again."

There was a men's hostel but it was not a patch on Warwickshire House. Geoffrey Vince, 86, who worked his way up to become a fabric buyer at the store stayed in the men's hostel in Berners Street, just off Oxford Street. He met his



India doesn't need our aid any more... but Britain does

THE AIR is filled with complaints about government cuts and the loudest belong to Labour MPs anxious to divert our attention from the truth: that the cuts are necessary to repair the damage done to our economy by their party's government, which almost bankrupted us.

Their hypocritical complaints will grow louder as the cuts get deeper and we wonder whether any area will be immune. That is actually an interesting question because there is one department whose funding is about to increase substantially.

Many Conservative MPs are said to be seething with anger that, at a time when we are cutting back on funding for the armed forces and the police, as well as prisons, schools, libraries, swimming pools, meals on wheels and nurseries, the Department for International Development's annual budget is to soar from about £7billion this year to £11billion in just four years time. Even as we

are suffering cuts, the government has decided that we should give £1billion of hard-earned taxpayers' cash in aid to India over the next four years.

Now I have seen the beggars sleeping on the pavements in India but the country is one of the world's fastest growing

economies and its government must help those in need.

In the last three months of 2010 our economy shrank while India's is forecast to grow at about 8.5 per cent a year. Many British firms base their call centres there. India is a nuclear power and spends roughly the same percentage of its national income on defence as we do. It also has a space programme, a luxury we cannot afford.

In 2009, according to one measure used by the World Bank, India was the fourth largest economy in the world, bigger than us at No 6. You might wonder who should be sending aid to whom.

The courteous Indians have politely told us that they don't need our aid any more and would not object if it was withdrawn. We should take them at their word, fold our tents and quietly depart; wish them well and remain good friends.

Over the next four years of financial hardship we need to spend the money right here at home. After all, £250million a year for four years would improve conditions for many of the long-suffering elderly. It would provide better care for those brave soldiers wounded in the service of their country. It would mend a lot of leaky school roofs. It would let us see far more proper police and far fewer hoiligans on our streets.

There are so many things crying out for attention here. For at least the next four years of painful cuts, we should let charity begin at home.

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