



*Leatherhead & District Local History Society
covering Ashted, the Bookhams, Fetcham, Headley,
Mickleham and Leatherhead*

Newsletter

March 2022



*Above: The third Leatherhead
Cottage Hospital, pride of
the local community in the
early days of the National
Health Service.
See Page 9 for the
background story.*

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2022 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

The membership year began 1 January.

Society: £20. Add £6 for another adult in the same household. Friends of Leatherhead Museum: £5 per person. Thank you if you have already renewed. If a renewal form is enclosed with this *Newsletter* it is because at the time of printing you appear to be in arrears for the year. Your subscription supports the Museum and funds this quarterly *Newsletter*. If you have yet to renew or are not already a member and are reading this online, [please click here](#) and print the form as a completed one is required in all cases. If you prefer to pay online rather than by cheque please request BACS details from Frank Haslam, Membership Secretary, Page 39.

**EDITORIAL**

This edition of the *Newsletter* contains a special feature on Leatherhead's historic cottage hospitals based on material supplied by Fred Meynen, former L&DLHS chairman as well as founder and chairman of the League of Friends. As a former local GP, Fred's involvement in local health matters surpasses even his breadth of knowledge about Leatherhead history.

The lecture report on Rev Sidney Sedgwick on Page 15 is the first in a new series of articles this year covering his book *Letherhead and its Legends*, published over 120 years ago. More to come on that in June. On Page 16 we also cover the second part of last year's fascinating talk on the work of a brilliant local photographer before the First World War.

Other reports cover a Surrey campaign by a founder of the National Trust on Page 22 and one of Britain's once best known cartoonists who lived locally on Page 28. Included too on Page 36 is the very last of Edwina Vardey's historic oral history interviews to see the light of day for the first time, either here in the *Newsletter* or during the presentation at the Leatherhead Institute some years ago. Conducted in 1979, this was one of her earliest interviews with a notable local resident and so much more has changed in the town since he was talking.

News from the Museum on Page 6 confirms this year's reopening date as the end of this month so if you would like to volunteer as a steward for spring, summer and autumn, do contact the managers.

The December *Newsletter* obituary for Gwen Hoad, one of the Museum's most active volunteers, should have mentioned that she also established the first shop at Hampton Cottage in the 1980s and ran it single-handedly for some 25 years while also treasurer of the Friends Committee. Thanks to Gwen the Society was able to buy many important items over the years.

TONY MATTHEWS



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

While the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic continues, we hope the decline in infections and fewer hospitalisations will permit us to continue our lives more conventionally this year. Most of our regular activities are continuing normally, apart from talks in the Abraham Dixon Hall. Some questions remain about use of the hall and as Zoom users are aware, there are technical issues to solve before we can reliably provide hybrid meetings again. However, as soon as these are fully fixed we will offer them for both in-person and Zoom audiences.

The Society's continuing post-holder vacancies are also affecting our traditionally smooth running activities. Most pressing is the lack of archivists for both Leatherhead and Bookham. An archivist needs some knowledge of the parish they are looking after but someone who is completely new can start by reading our excellent history books. Some should be available to read in the Museum when it reopens as well as local libraries and a couple of local bookshops.

Most of our records are abstractions made from primary sources many years ago. Existing compilations are invaluable to new researchers who would otherwise have to travel widely to search the primary archives, as did our predecessors. For example, the primary sources for Ashted are as far apart as Arundel and Kendal! Skills such as document preparation and scanning are useful but the volume of work could be managed by involving assistants. For example, local u3a members scanned our large collection of Ashted photographs. If you think you might be interested in archive work, please feel free to discuss this with me.

Looking forward once more, we are hopeful that we will be able to organise more activities in 2022 than in the past two years. We are particularly looking forward to celebrating our 75th anniversary at an outside event in the summer. This should have been in November last year but we felt we could not do it justice then. I look forward to seeing you at this and other in-person activities.

JOHN ROWLEY

PROGRAMME OF FUTURE ACTIVITIES

To keep up to date on our events please visit our web-site www.leatherheadhistory.org and in the *Society* dropdown menu click *Forthcoming Events*

Friday, 18 March: L&DLHS Annual General Meeting. This will probably be held via Zoom. Members will be sent the necessary information in good time.

Friday, 22 April 22nd: This will probably be held in the Abraham Dixon Hall of the Leatherhead Institute. The talk will be by John Hawks of the Merton Priory Trust on *Merton Priory*, which played a significant role in the history of Leatherhead and the surrounding district

CONDOLENCES

DAVID LOKKERBOL

David Lokkerbol, who was L&DLHS treasurer for several years before Carl Leyshon, died in November 2021 following an accident. He was on a tall ladder which slipped while he was doing some tree maintenance at Leatherhead Bowling Club in Fortyfoot Road, Leatherhead, where he was the captain. David had also been active in other local organisations including scouting and cycling. He will be missed and our condolences go to Sue and the family.

GORDON KNOWLES

Gordon Knowles, longstanding L&DLHS member, trustee and office-holder, died on 18 January. He will be missed by the many who remember him and those more widely who benefited from the work he did for the Society. He was on the Executive Committee for many years, including a long period as programme and lectures secretary. He was Society President 2007-2013, preceded by Linda Heath and succeeded by Alan Pooley. He was also chairman of the Surrey Industrial History Group where we recall he had particular interests in railways and aviation.

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

After the usual winter closure, the Museum will re-open for 2022 on Tuesday, 31 March. The Friends continue to maintain, operate and administer the Museum and we hope for a return of school visits and/or craft days this year. The Friends' 2022 AGM will be held this month via Zoom, date to be confirmed.

Twelve stewards resigned last year, making staffing exceptionally tricky but we have been able to recruit eight new people, largely due to the plea in last winter's *Newsletter*. All are now trained and working. The total number of stewards is now 36.

The annual spring training day was cancelled last year because of Covid-19 but was replaced by two summer training sessions once the Covid controls were agreed. However we still need more volunteers, including workers, stewards, a storeroom manager and a curator. We remain concerned that the pandemic could continue to deter volunteers from returning.

Although we still lack a curator, our interim arrangements and display team seem to be working well. The Hollis Room's 1960s theme will continue this year. Dorothy Stapleton takes most credit for creating this with its authentic clothes of the era, including by Mary Quant. Our summer exhibition of paintings by the late John Ainley, a founder of the Leatherhead Art Club, is still provisional.

The front bay window history displays initiated by the late John Morris are changed regularly and attract much interest from passers-by. Important maintenance work has been undertaken inside and outside the buildings, and a 2.4m demountable 'LEATHERHEAD MUSEUM' sail-mast is now in use by the front door. A new name-board is proposed instead of the banner on the east façade.

The plaque commemorating Linda Heath's bequest has been fitted on the west wall overlooking the garden and will be officially unveiled this year.

Some rationalisation of our artefacts is needed. The L&DLHS Bookham archive has now been relocated to the Priory storeroom. We particularly recommend that a store manager role be created.

PETER HUMPHREYS and DUNCAN MACFARLANE

CHRISTMAS MISCELLANY REPORT

THE CENTRE FOR MILITARY STRESS RELIEF

Combat Stress, formerly the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society, has its headquarters today at Tyrwhitt House, Leatherhead (right, above). The building is named after Admiral Sir Reginald Tyrwhitt, society president after the death in 1931 of founder Sir Frederick Milner. But Milner House in Ermyn Way, Leatherhead (right, below), now a care home for the elderly, takes its name from Sir Frederick himself and formerly served stress victims from the military.



This local association with stress relief featured in the Christmas Miscellany talk by L&DLHS chairman **JOHN ROWLEY**. He covered two angles – the



history of what was formerly known as Frederick Milner House, and the story of ‘Pill Box Hero’ Captain Harry Reynolds (left), winner of both the Victoria and Military Crosses in World War 1, who later became superintendent of Frederick Milner House.

Sir Frederick, known as ‘the Soldiers and Sailors Friend’, established the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society in 1919 to campaign for shell-shocked veterans. He was among forward-thinkers who felt they should not be treated in asylums. In 1926, he bought what was then The Long House, Leatherhead, on behalf of the society and sought to engage military stress victims in a positive environment.



Left: Frederick Milner House with factory, market garden and an artificial silk works next door in the 1930s.

He built a factory and market garden in the grounds which both provided them with wages and skills and raised funds for those unable to work. The grounds hosted fundraising garden parties. In 1932, the future King George VI and Elizabeth, the later Queen Mother, attended one garden party while visiting Polesden Lacey nearby at Bookham.

Captain Harry Reynolds (1879-1948) from Northamptonshire, had a military career dating back to 1901 in the territorials and secured a commission in the Royal Scots in 1915. In 1917 he won the MC for actions under fire at Arras and then the VC for similar behaviour at Ypres where he led a successful attack on a German pill box despite injury. He continued a military career after the war until 1927 and in 1930 joined the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society as superintendent of the Eden Lodge, Beckenham, moving in 1933 with his wife Gwen to Frederick Milner House.

He developed various initiatives there including marketing herbs, strawberries and honey locally, drawing on his own family farming origins. He also bought a patent and established the manufacture of electric blankets by patients working in the factory. They had the brand name Thermega.

During World War 2, Frederick Milner House provided accommodation for bombed-out families as well as continuing its work with servicemen. Changes forced by new wartime conditions meant Harry and Gwen, until then the house manager, had to move out and he left the society in 1942 although the family now lived in The Brown House, Skinners Lane, Ashted. Harry died in 1948 and is buried at St Giles Church.

SPECIAL FEATURE MATERIAL PROVIDED BY DR FRED MEYNEN

LEATHERHEAD'S THREE COTTAGE HOSPITALS

Dr Fred Meynen, former L&DLHS chairman, was a general practitioner in Leatherhead from 1968-2000. For many years he has also been chairman of the League of Friends of Leatherhead Hospital.



Above left: Fred Meynen.

Above right: Charles Frederick Leach laid the foundation stone of the third Leatherhead Hospital on 25 May 1940.

A ward was named after him.

Below: The second hospital opened in 1904 but was inadequate by 1936.

The first Leatherhead Cottage Hospital was located at No 8 Clinton Road from 1893, beside a laundry. It had eight beds and ran up a £130 debt that could not be settled. So it closed in April 1902.

A local committee was formed to build a new hospital to replace it.



Various wealthy residents chipped in with funds and land was offered at Fortyfoot Road by Walter Cunliffe of Headley Court. The foundation stone of the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital was laid on 15 October 1903 by Mrs Alfred Tate and the new establishment opened officially on 4 August 1904 with just six beds and one cot. It cost £2625 to build and admitted 58 patients in its first year.

At first any qualified doctor might obtain permission to treat his patients at the hospital although this was later restricted to those living within three miles and practising for at least two years. In the absence of free health service care, patients were expected to pay between half a crown and 10s/6d a week.

Another ward was added in 1909 costing £850 and by 1913 patient numbers had risen to 111. The formidable Miss Mary Munro was appointed matron in 1910 and would remain until 1941, by which time a third cottage hospital had had to be built.

Passing years brought ever increasing demand and bed numbers rose to 17 by 1925 accompanied by expanded facilities. 1927 brought 381 patients and the growing practice of providing hospital instead of home treatment for sick children and maternity cases meant an inexorable rise in numbers. A waiting room was now required as well as an accident and emergency ward.

Staff numbers continued to build too. In 1928 Fairmead, a large house on Epsom Road, was purchased. X-ray and other equipment for electrical and therapeutic treatments was installed there but the main purpose was to provide sleeping accommodation for nurses and domestic staff and so allow more space at the hospital itself for patients. By 1936 there were plans to spend £40,000 on a totally new building after annual treatments in a single year reached 3248.

A site of over 15 acres had been identified on the old orchard of Winfield in Poplar Road and Charles Leach, president of the hospital committee, personally bought it for £10,000 to pre-empt housing development. With colleagues Claude Stenning and Dr Carl Von Bergen, Leach completed transfer of ownership just days before World War 2 broke out and managed to fend off suspension of all new building activity by getting enough materials to the site to ensure work could go ahead. Leach laid the foundation stone on 25 May 1940 and the new hospital opened 26 June 1941 with 24 beds



*Above: Theatre nurse Mulligan in 1950.
Top left: Fairmead nurses' home.
Mid left: Meeting of doctors Philip Elman, RG Gilbert, AD Everett and Helen Gavin.
Bottom left: Matron Lines gets retirement well wishes in 1958 from GP and hospital campaigner, Dr Carl Von Bergen.*



The photos on this and the next two pages were all taken in wartime, 1942.

*Above:
The day-time nurses.
Left: Part of the night nursing staff.*

*Opposite:
A hospital receptionist takes calls.*

for adults, ten for children and six private rooms.

Matron Munro had retired six months earlier after treating a total of 6000 patients and was given a party at the New Bull Hotel. Her successor was the equally formidable Miss Blanche Lines, recruited from Bart's Hospital in London, who would go on to serve until her own retirement in 1958.

In summer 1948 with the creation of the National Health Service, the Leatherhead Hospital governing body was abolished and the management taken over by the newly formed Epsom Group management committee. Charles Leach had died five years earlier but Dr Von Bergen, a dominant figure in local general practice since the early days of the century, described the takeover as Leatherhead Hospital's 'D-Day'.

In 1960 a group of volunteers founded the League of Friends of Leatherhead Hospital. In the years that followed they would raise some £4 million to pay for structural work and equipment. Fred is still involved with the League of Friends today and it is hoped the hospital will continue to be a valued community facility for years to come.





The war was not permitted to interfere with Christmas celebrations at the hospital.



Above: Fun for children was provided in the Leach Ward.

Left: Hanging the Christmas tree in the Children's Ward.

LECTURE REPORT

THE IMPACT OF REV SIDNEY SEDGWICK

In November FRANK HASLAM talked about the curate of Leatherhead Parish Church from 1897-1905. Writer, composer, cleric, his book *Letherhead and its Legends* has fascinated readers since 1901.



Rev Sidney Newman Sedgwick (1873-1941) (right) stressed that his book *Letherhead and its Legends*, first published in 1901, was written strictly as a collection of legends and did not pretend to historical accuracy.

He also wrote several novels, some about Roman Britain, and composed both words and music of several amusing operettas in the Gilbert & Sullivan style which were performed in the Letherhead Institute.

He lived at 3 Fairfield House, now part of the Working Mens' Club. This is quite appropriate as he was keen to improve the living conditions of working people in his day. His housekeeper there was Charlotte Tate, who married Harvey Collyer in 1903. When Sedgwick moved on in 1905 to become rector of Bishopstoke, near Portsea, the Collyers followed him.

Charlotte's health was not good and later in 1912 they decided to go to California. Tragically, they sailed on the *Titanic*, and although Charlotte and her daughter survived, Harvey drowned.

In 1922 Sedgwick became rector of Liss in Hampshire, and in 1934 his final parish was Warnford, also in Hampshire. He retired in 1938 and died in Liss in 1941 in a small housing development whose construction he had himself arranged to provide employment during the Depression years.

A man of exceptionally wide interests and talents, he was remembered with great affection in all of his parishes. The new series summarising the legends in his book starts in the next *Newsletter*.

LECTURE REPORT

THE PAST ON GLASS

In the June 2021 Zoom lecture, Banstead historian JAMES CROUCH presented the extraordinary stories of David Knights-Whittome, 'Photographer to the King', and some of his clients who were resident in Ashted and Leatherhead in the very early 20th century. Part 1 of the report appeared in the December *Newsletter*. Here is Part 2.

Women volunteered to work as nurses in World War 1. A photo (Page 18) showed Mary Scholefield of St Issells in Woodfield Lane, daughter of a bar-rister, who joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment like many wealthy young ladies. They were unpaid and financed their own training and equipment.

They would work under supervision in support of professional nurses, changing dressings, cleaning hospital wards, preparing supplies and being on duty at night. They worked in Leatherhead at Red House, used as a Red Cross auxiliary hospital for the duration of the war.

Another photo showed a Miss Rouquette, one of two sisters who could be either Margaret or Catherine. Margaret was also a VAD nurse at Red House while Catherine married the medical officer, Dr Max Balzar Reichwald of Timber Hill, High Street, Ashted.

The Rouquette and Reichwald families were both originally German but had settled in England many years earlier. Max and Catherine had honeymooned in the Tyrol only a few weeks before the war broke out. He had been the medical officer for the Ashted St John ambulance company and now held that role for the combined Red Cross. They went on to have a son who earned the Military Cross in



**Above:
David Knights-
Whittome,
'Photographer to
the King'**

World War 2.

The Rouquettes lived at Highfields House on the corner of Highfields and Skinners Lane but moved to Woodfield Lane. Nearby too lived the Wigston family. They lived at Rushmere in what is now The Marld, then New Road. Two photos showed the mother, Lucy, and daughter Muriel in clothing fashionable at the time but also familiar more recently.

A son, Geoffrey, appeared in another photo. He was a career soldier who attended Sandhurst about a year before the war. With 1st East Surreys, he defended a hill courageously in spring 1915. He suffered a minor leg wound but was soon back in action, only to be shot along with a fellow officer while standing in a trench. A bullet hit the other man in the left forearm and went straight through Geoffrey's thigh too.

He came home to recover for a year before returning with another battalion, the 2nd Royal Sussex, in summer 1916 at the peak of the Battle of the Somme. This battalion had just been decimated and Geoffrey, a Captain, was one of hundreds of reinforcements.

Just 11 days after returning to France, he was leading his company in an attack on a wood with a trench to the right of it. They advanced in neatly dressed serried ranks with their rifles at high port and the sun glinting off their bayonets. When the Germans had recovered from the shock of a detonated mine under their position, they started machine gunning his men who fell like nine-pins. Geoffrey was reported wounded at first but disappeared and was confirmed dead months later. His body was buried on the battlefield and later transferred to Caterpillar Valley cemetery.

The next photos showed two of the three Keeping sisters, daughters of George Keeping, postmaster at Leatherhead telephone exchange from 1907. Leatherhead had its exchange very early in the century. In 1902 its first purpose-hired telephonist was taken on. Winifred-Keeping started work there when her father took over the post office. Her younger sister Kathleen joined later and would become telephone supervisor. Other family members involved in the post office included a brother working in Epsom.

Although these were not really wealthy like the people mentioned earlier, they still lived in a seven-bedroom house in Park Rise, Leatherhead. However their inclusion within the collection showed



Above: Barrister's daughter Mary Scholefield joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment in World War 1 like many wealthy young ladies.

that posing for photography was becoming more affordable, even though it was still largely the preserve of the wealthy until mass produced cameras hit the streets after World War 1.

Next shown were sisters Betty and Jean Hyatt whose father, Russell Hyatt, was an East India merchant. They lived at Nethersett, Reigate Road, Leatherhead. They came from Huguenot origins. As they had independent means, these girls did not take jobs like the Keeping sisters. Jean became a writer on social issues, campaigning on behalf of the poor of Westminster where many families lived in absolute poverty within one of England's richest boroughs. She lobbied the local authority and eventually joined the Communist Party, becoming a prospective candidate for the city council.

*Right: Jean Hyatt ,
daughter of an East
India merchant,
became a writer on
social issues,
campaigning for the
poor and joined the
Communist Party.*

She later stood on behalf of Shoreham for Sevenoaks District Council but lost to a local farmer. Despite this setback, she became involved in village life and the Women's Institute.

By this time she had become Mrs Feldmar, having married a former fraudster, robber and convict called Lewis

Feldmar. He was apparently a reformed character by the time of their marriage and subsequently avoided known crime, although it was unclear if he ever actually divorced his first wife in order to wed Jean. They were not married when she stood for election in Shoreham but still took the name Feldmar.

The next photo showed Miss Beryl Ritchie on horseback at her home, Boxhurst, in the shadow of Box Hill near Reigate Road. She was a keen equestrian, winning local prizes at shows. She met her husband, Nat Kindersley, an army officer who became an instructor at an equestrian school in India for three years, leaving her at home with a young baby. He returned for a while before joining action in World War 2 where he was captured at Dunkirk, spending the next five years in captivity. Before the war he represented the army at international show-jumping. Beryl rode his horse Maguire at the Horsham gymkhana. Just months after returning home, Nat rode the



same horse at the first national show-jumping championships after the war and scored a perfect round, winning the competition to a standing ovation. He later managed the British equestrian team at two Olympic Games.

Other photos from the collection depicted scenes rather than portraits. Among these was the house Ashted Park, home of Greek merchant Pantia Ralli, during a flower show, a last peacetime social event on 1 August 1914. The show judge was William Bain, head gardener of Sir Trevor Lawrence's Burford Lodge estate, also shown in photos. Sir Trevor was a famous horticulturalist and their garden was known nationally.



Above: Sir Trevor Lawrence of Burford Lodge, was a surgeon, a Surrey Member of Parliament for 17 years, and president of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Sir Trevor was a surgeon, a Surrey Member of Parliament for 17 years, and president of the Royal Horticultural Society. He collected orchids and a whole genus is now named *Trevoria* in his honour. He also has an iris named after him, a tulip, a begonia and a clematis. Other photos showed his collection of Japanese objets d'art and other contents of the house.



Shown next was St John's School in Leatherhead with line-ups of boys in 1912 and 1913, half of whom would not return from the war. Another photo showed Tower House, the prep school in Tower Hill Road, south of Dorking, which was founded in 1899 by Gerard and Louise Olivier, parents of the later actor Laurence Olivier (above right, not from the collection). They ran it for about five years after a tricky start when Louise fell ill and lost a baby. Gerard became curate at St Martin's Church, Dorking in 1904 and they sold the school a few months after the photo was taken.

REPORT ON THE 408 BUS SERVICE

FRANK RICE-OXLEY writes: In August 1932, the East Surrey Traction Company was founded to develop bus service routes from London into Surrey. These were initially prefixed 01-09. The 08 started, I believe, from West Croydon to Guildford.

By 1935, London Transport had taken over all the independent bus companies, prefixing those in Surrey with prefix 4 so 08 became 408 travelling from West Croydon to Guildford via Epsom, Ashted, Leatherhead, Great Bookham, Effingham Douglas Haig, Effingham Junction, East Horsley, Clandon, Guildford. At the same time, route 408A was established from East Clandon to Guildford.

My late wife Mary discovered the 1912 start of Surrey Buses from the book *East Surrey* by Bell Street. Before the takeover, all the East Surrey Traction routes were prefixed S subsequently to change to 400s. Bell Street was the headquarters and workshop of the company. At one time East Surrey Traction owned some 300 buses and coaches in all.

LECTURE REPORT

WHAT OCTAVIA HILL AND ROBERT HUNTER DID FOR SURREY



On 15 October last, ANNE MILTON-WORSSELL gave the first hybrid L&DLHS monthly talk both for members attending the Letherhead Institute and those using Zoom from home. Anne had been going through the correspondence of two founders of the National Trust (shown above with the third member, Canon Rawnsley centre) and was amazed at what they had preserved in Surrey even before the NT came into being.

For those of us who live in Surrey, the huge areas of countryside are seen as some of the most beautiful in England. It seems amazing that in the heavily populated south-east there are so many beautiful places. There might not have been but for the relationship that existed between a number of middle class pioneers who sought to preserve the English countryside for the people in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

I want to focus on Octavia Hill and Robert Hunter who spent significant time on committees, writing and corresponding even before the founding of the organisation that made them famous.

Octavia Hill lived most of her life in London but owned a small house, Larksfield at Crockham Hill on the border between Surrey and Kent. It was built in 1877 and she later gave several acres of

***Right:
Octavia Hill's
Surrey home,
Larksfield.***



woodland in the neighbourhood to the National Trust.

Robert Hunter settled in Surrey for the latter part of his life in a largish house, Meadfields in Three Gates Lane, Haslemere. Octavia Hill was one of his most frequent correspondents. She is better known than he is, perhaps because she was one of those extraordinary women of the 19th century, or perhaps because she exuded enthusiasm while he provided the good sense and legal knowledge.

They were, in fact, opposites in character. Her interests were broad and she is best known as a social reformer. She wrote widely, and volumes of her letters have been published. A number are held in Sir Robert Hunter's collection at the Surrey History Centre.

Octavia was born in 1838. Her parents embraced ideas of Christian Socialism. Her father, James Hill, was involved with securing a pardon for the last man sentenced to death for stealing a sheep and was keen to improve education for all. Her mother, originally Caroline Southwood Smith, was a governess from a family well-known for involvement in humanitarian causes.

As a result of her father's bankruptcy in 1840 Octavia and the rest of the family moved to her grandfather's home in Highgate. It was there that she began to experience the liberal political talk of the day. She became involved in co-operative projects, and through this came into contact with the poorer people of London.

After considerable involvement in the Women's Co-operative Guild in the 1850s, and meetings with important radical figures such as John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, and Thomas Hughes she developed a real excitement about the work of the Christian Socialists. In the early 1860s she was teaching in Nottingham Place School and became fully aware of the difficulties that poverty produced.



Left: Robert Hunter's house in Haslemere, Meadfields.

Most of all she became aware of the lack of light and space in housing.

In 1865, with the help of Ruskin, she was able to buy three houses in Paradise Place. They were in a terrible condition but within a year had been brought up to a good standard. She was able to rent out rooms at a reasonable

rate to improve the housing standards of some poor people.

She became a successful lobbyist, having a hand in the Artisans' Dwelling Bill of 1875. The Hill family as a whole had broader interests. Octavia's sister Miranda in 1875 read a paper to the girls at the Nottingham Place School where she was teaching, suggesting a Society for the Diffusion of Beauty. This eventually became the Kyrle Society, named after Alexander Pope's character, John Kyrle, who provided his home town with a park and an alleyway of elm trees.

The society's overall aim was *'to bring the refining and cheering influences of natural and artistic beauty home to the people'*. This was to be undertaken in different ways including decorating workmen's clubs, schools and mission rooms with paintings and flowers, organising oratorios and concerts, and securing open spaces in poor neighbourhoods, laying them out as public gardens.

The Kyrle Society offered to co-operate with the Commons Preservation Society in preserving open spaces, particularly in rural localities and Octavia became heavily involved with Robert Hunter, its solicitor, who was asked to serve as the Kyrle Society's chairman. The open spaces sub-committee attempted to take over gardens of the rich, particularly those unused, disused graveyards, abandoned ground, and school playgrounds.

Octavia became disillusioned with the cumbersome methods of protecting open spaces by relying on the goodwill of landowners. The 'right to wander freely, and to enjoy the beauty of earth and sky' was not quantifiable in money terms. She came to believe in a scheme for purchasing important land which eventually led to her correspondence with Robert Hunter and the foundation of the National Trust.

The Commons Preservation Society worked initially with landowners to maintain a quantity of open space with improved rights of access for the general public. All land was still privately owned. Even maintaining open spaces did not always retain their natural beauty. The Kyrle Society's emphasis on beauty, both natural and artificial, led to greater consideration of these aspects.

Octavia came to believe the only way of retaining open space was to purchase it for the benefit of the public. We see this reflected in the purchases made in Surrey in her time.

Robert Hunter was born in 1844 in Camberwell. His father, who had started as a mariner, established a mercantile business in London. Robert completed his education at University College in 1864 gaining firsts in logic and moral philosophy. In 1865 he enrolled as an articled clerk with a firm of solicitors. He was noticed when Sir Henry Peek of Wimbledon offered prizes of £400 for the best essays on '*Commons and the best means of preserving them for the public*'. He wrote one of the best and it was subsequently published. Many of his ideas were exactly in tune with those of the Commons Preservation Society which appointed him as its honorary solicitor aged just 24.

He was much involved in cases in which the society succeeded in blocking commons enclosures. The Metropolitan Commons Act of 1866 was used with great effect, particularly in the case of Epping Forest and other London commons. His first wife died in childbirth and he remarried in 1877. In 1882 he became chief solicitor to the Post Office but continued to advise the Commons Preservation Society and in 1883 he moved to Haslemere where he lived the rest of his life.

He and Octavia joined Canon Rawnsley in 1883 to fight a railway bill proposed for Derwentwater and Borrowdale in the Lake District and together they all fought to retain two important rights of way in the Keswick area.

Robert's presence in Surrey influenced commons preservation in the county and after being knighted for his endeavours, he lived just long enough to see Box Hill saved for the nation. But his own greatest local achievement was to save Hindhead Common, more commonly known as the Devil's Punchbowl, in 1905.

By the 1880s Haslemere was considered a select place to live, with 'bracing air'. It welcomed John Tyndall, the eminent scientist, followed by Professor Thomas Huxley and Bertrand Russell's uncle Rollo. An eccentric community grew up of 'advanced ideas' and Haslemere and its surrounding hills was referred to in advertisements as 'the little Alps'.

It became a successful town and its parish council functioned more as a town council. At its inception in 1894 Sir Robert Hunter was appointed its first chairman. Protection of the surrounding open space were always uppermost on the agenda. On 5 May 1899 the council received a letter calling attention to the 'removal and destruction of hollies and other trees from the open spaces on Hindhead'.

The council expressed a hope that Mr Whitaker Wright, the landowner, would prevent any further injury to an area of such value to the public. Since 1884 the Haslemere Commons Committee had aimed to preserve the common and wastelands in the neighbourhood of Haslemere in their open condition. Its committee included Robert Hunter and other local residents.

The *Surrey Times* expressed local fears: *'Many residents of Hindhead are not a little annoyed and certainly very much grieved at the poor respect which the new Lord of the Manor (Mr Whitaker Wright) is apparently showing for the natural beauty and adornments of Hindhead Common and the Punchbowl.'*



Whitaker Wright (depicted left) was allowing gangs of workmen with machinery to lift the hollies, along with large clumps of earth, to landscape his new dwelling at Lea Park. From humble origins he had emigrated to America but returned to England having lost considerable funds in business. Eight years later, he had some-

how become a millionaire, and acquired the manor of Witley, which included lordship of Hindhead Common and the Devil's Punchbowl.

He kept more than 500 workmen busy with the improvements he was making to Lea Park (now Witley Park). He designed a series of three artificial lakes with an underground room under one of them. Haslemere Council contacted his agent in an effort to agree a lease of manorial rights as they previously had with other landowners although much of the land did not actually fall into the parish's jurisdiction.

Then in 1900 Whitaker Wright was denounced at a company annual general meeting for misuse of invested funds. In March 1902 it was decided he should stand trial for fraud. He had already moved to Paris and then attempted to travel to New York to escape the law but a warrant was waiting for him and he was arrested on landing. Eventually he was extradited, brought back to England, tried in January 1904, received a seven-year prison sentence, but committed suicide rather than be jailed.

His property was auctioned by the Chancery Division in 50 lots with lot 47 '*the manorial rights over Hindhead Commons, including Devil's Punchbowl, Gibbet Hill etc. 750 acres timber included*'. The resurrected Haslemere Commons and Footpaths Society formed the Hindhead Preservation Committee, aiming to buy it. Around £4000 was required and the property would be vested in a public body with management by a local committee.

The public body selected was the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty, set up by Robert Hunter who also became chairman of the Hindhead Preservation Committee. An appeal for funds was made and subscribers included many conservationists including the Rt. Hon. G. Shaw-Lefevre, founder of the Commons Preservation Society, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Jekyll family, Octavia Hill, and Robert Hunter himself.

By the time the auction was held in Godalming on 26 October 1905 the committee had received promises totalling just over £3200 and eventually secured the lot at £3624 or just over £4.10s an acre. The land was conveyed to the National Trust on 22 March 1906.

FEATURE

CARTOONIST BARRY APPLEBY AND THE LEATHERHEAD FIRE BRIGADE



Leonard Lewer was a well-known Leatherhead gardener during World War 2 as well as a voluntary fireman. Alongside him in the brigade was the later cartoonist Barry Appleby, creator of *The Gambols* comic strip which appeared in the *Daily Express* for almost 50 years. CATHY LEWER, Leonard's granddaughter, has an interesting angle to their story.



Long before computers and smart phones were even specks in the eyes of the technological wizards who have brought them to our desks and pockets, a different type of wizard had already penned the name 'App', claiming it as his own.

If you can turn your minds back to the 1950s, you may recall a time when the daily paper plopped on the doormat of almost every

household very early every morning. If the *Daily Express* was your choice, you might well have enjoyed reading the cartoon strip about George and Gaye Gambol, brought to you by Barry Appleby and his wife, Dobs.

Barry, born 1909 in Handsworth, Staffordshire, met Dobs when he was 14 and she 13. Twice she laughed at him when he landed at her feet - first at a football match in Kingston-upon-Thames when he missed an easy goal, and then a couple of days later, when he swerved to miss her while out riding his bike. So began a lifelong partnership. They set up a small office together as journalists, married in 1936, and moved to White Ladies in Pleasure Pit Road, Ashted.

While Barry did not have much luck with his writing, Dobs was far more successful. He abandoned journalism and went back to his first love, art. After studying at several venerable institutions, he turned his hand to cartooning. His first published cartoon was signed 'App' and appeared in *Punch*. In 1938 he was taken on by London's *Evening Star* newspaper as a jokey cartoonist every day.

On the outbreak of World War 2 he began contributing to the servicemen's newspaper *Reveille*, creating his first comic strip about the exploits of the bird-brained Captain Wah. But he also joined the fire service full-time while Dobs drove ambulances. As their jobs took up much time, they started sharing the cartoon work.

The Gambols characters began soon after VJ Day when Barry's cartoons first appeared in the *Daily Express*. The chubby little man with heavy eyebrows, sometimes accompanied by his curly haired, blonde wife, became a readers' favourite so Barry and Dobs started thinking about a regular strip cartoon. Dobs came up with the name.

From 16 March 1950, *The Gambols* appeared three times a week as a strip and three times as a single panel. By 1956 they were also a regular feature of the *Sunday Express* and continued delighting readers after Dobs' death in 1985 until Barry died in 1996.

On 20 March 1954 at the Bridge Restaurant, Leatherhead, the eighth annual reunion dinner of the Leatherhead Fire Brigade took place. Barry drew cartoons for the event menu which you can see on Page 28. My grandfather Leonard was there too.

The event was chaired by Alderman J A Farmer of Surrey County Council who had also opened the second L&DLHS AGM on



Above: The Gambols used gentle humour to portray George and Gaye.

17 November 1948 at the district council offices and had been elected at the very first executive committee meeting of the L&DLHS on 3 December 1946. He toasted the Queen. Other toasts were given by Councillor Thomas Devitt, chairman of Leatherhead Urban District Council; Bookham retailer Harry Absalom; Arthur Johnstone, chief officer of Surrey Fire Brigade; solicitor Hugh Fortescue, brother of L&DLHS founder Stephen; and Inspector Ronald Nichols, officer in charge at Leatherhead, a sub-division of Surrey Constabulary.

Entertainment was provided by Les Henning, billed as 'the maestro of mirth', and Trevor Smith, on piano. Les Henning appeared regularly in the early 1940s as entertainer and compère in London and the south-east before serving in the RAF. After the war he was a popular choice for ex-servicemen's entertainment.

The menu included 'Lewer Greens' provided by my grandfather, Leonard. He appears in the centre of the photo below with Barry Appleby's hand on his shoulder. The cartoonist is obscured behind another guest. The other faces shown have been lost to history. Can anyone put names to these heroes of wartime Leatherhead?



FEATURE

CHILWORTH GUNPOWDER MILLS

by ANITA LAYCOCK

Bookham u3a Social History Group 1

My talk to the Bookham u3a last September featured the history of the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills, near Guildford. Hidden away in the Surrey hills are the ruins of an industry that dominated the area for over 300 years.

The fast-flowing River Tillingbourne (right) attracted industry as it could be utilised to power water mills. The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded a mill in the area and in later years paper and corn mills were established.



In the 16th century the Evelyn family from Wootton set up a gunpowder works. By the mid 17th century its main customer was the English Government and the mills supplied the Parliamentarians with gunpowder during the Civil War of the 1640s. However, governments could be poor payers and it was all too easy for powder manufacturers to fail when facing financial problems.

In the 19th century business picked up again and the gunpowder works at the site expanded alongside paper mills.

Gunpowder was originally invented in China in the 9th century, a mix of 75% saltpetre, 15% charcoal and 10% sulphur. Each of these components needed to be ground up before being mixed. There were six separate stages and each required its own building.

The ingredients would be weighed out and combined in the incorporating mill. Then they would be mixed with water to minimise the risk of fire and ground together between two vertical mill wheels. More water was added to form a mill rake which was then compressed in the press house and all moisture removed.

This process made the gunpowder mixture more potent and



Above: You can still see mill wheels and posts once used in the gunpowder production process. Below: The site, now a pretty woodland trail, contains over 100 historic buildings like this one.



improved its explosive qualities. The pressed gunpowder was sieved in the corning house and rolled with lead to make it more water-resistant. It was dried in the stove and the resulting product taken to the packing house where it was weighed and packed into barrels ready for transport and sale.

The Tillingbourne valley was a large area, enabling the different workshops to be spread out. This was an important safety measure. They were separated by large clumps of trees which meant that if there was an explosion in one building it was far less likely to spread and cause massive destruction. However, accidents did occur, sadly depriving many families of their breadwinner.

The raw materials for making gunpowder were brought into Chilworth in barges on the river, and barrels of gunpowder were generally sent to the Wey Navigations and transported by canal to magazines on the Thames and sometimes down to Portsmouth for the Royal Navy. As well as for military purposes, it was used in shooting sports and for blasting in mines.

The most substantial remains of the works today are buildings dating from the late 19th century. Paper mills were introduced at the Upper Works in 1809 which operated at the site until the 1870s. However, introduction of steam power in the mid 19th century allowed the gunpowder works to expand significantly. The Sharp family, owners since 1819, sold the works to the newly formed Chilworth Gunpowder Company in 1885, raising the vast sum of £100,000.

In 1909 there were 300 men and six women working at the site, mostly walking there from neighbouring villages. Their working clothes included special brimless hats designed to stop gunpowder collecting in their hair which might explode after their return home. On arrival each morning they would also be checked for any items that might cause an accidental spark. Tobacco pipes for example would be hung on a nearby tree for collection at the end of the shift.

World War 1 dramatically increased demand for explosives and Chilworth became a significant contributor to the national war effort. The works manufactured cordite, a family of smokeless propellants, developed and produced to replace gunpowder for the military. Around 400 people were then employed at the site.

Along with a local printing works, the owners of the gunpowder works also funded the Greshambury Institute at Chilworth, where workers could attend art and science classes. It became an important site for development of safety measures. It was discovered that building banks of earth close to buildings where explosives were made helped to contain actual explosions and prevent danger to other buildings. This innovation became known as the Chilworth mounds. The earth banks were strengthened with corrugated iron and can still be seen today.

Demand for explosives naturally decreased after the war and the company closed in 1920. Some buildings were demolished and others

fell into ruin. From 1922 until 1963 some buildings were used as residences, known locally as ‘tin town’.

Today the site is a scheduled monument and efforts have been made to preserve the remaining ruins. Groups of volunteers maintain the site by coppicing trees and clearing undergrowth so that the ruins are more visible. Guildford Borough Council manages the site which is open to the public.

FEATURE

FIELD-MARSHAL GEORGE HOWARD **by BILL WHITMAN**

The manor of Great Bookham was given to William Howard, nephew of Lord Charles Howard, commander of the English fleet in the battle with the Spanish Armada.

Howard of Effingham was subsequently created Earl of Nottingham but this title died with his second son. The title of Baron of Effingham was however inherited from his father and passed to the Bookham Howards who bought the manor house at Eastwick as a country residence and owned about half the Parish. Their main residence was in London and many of the males became soldiers.

Only one, Sir George Howard (pictured opposite), reached the highest rank of field-marshal. Born in 1718 he was the son of Thomas Howard who fought at Dettingen and became Governor of Berwick. George was commissioned into his father’s regiment, the 24th Foot at the age of seven, a fraud, which gained him seniority but he only saw service when he was 18.

He commanded the 3rd Buffs at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745, but his regiment was hurriedly withdrawn to meet the challenge of Bonnie Prince Charlie and suffered a further defeat, once more under the command of the Duke of Cumberland, at Falkirk in 1745, the last time a British army was beaten in Britain.

This battle was followed by Culloden, when the Highland army was routed and Howard came in for criticism, as did ‘Butcher Cumberland’ for over-harsh treatment of the beaten Highlanders.

In 1768, Howard became governor of the Royal Hospital, until 1795 when he became governor of Jersey. He was promoted field-



marshal in 1793. He married the widow of his cousin, the Dowager Countess of Effingham, who appears in Fanny Burney's diary as Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte in 1771. He died in 1796 and is buried in the Howard family tomb at St Nicolas Church, Great Bookham, together with the first Earl and Countess of Effingham.

ORAL HISTORY

WALTER SIDNEY EKINS (1894-1986)

In August 1979, among the earliest of her oral history interviews for the L&DLHS, EDWINA VARDEY met Walter Ekins, a retired civil servant at his home in 11 Russell Court, Leatherhead. He had lived in the town for half a century and was active in the local community. He also played the piano and performed one of his own compositions at the end of the interview.

Walter was 85 when interviewed and had lived in Leatherhead since 1930. He had been born in Holloway on 12 May 1894 and had lived in Kilburn, Manor Park and Montreal.

Asked about his career, he said: 'I was a civil servant from the age of 15 onwards. I first went into the Post Office, then I graduated and had a year in the [Royal] Mint. I had two years in China with the Foreign Office, then I entered the Exchequer and Audit department in 1922. I retired in 1956 after quite a long career.'

Of his time in China he said: 'I worked at the consulate in Tsientsin and frequently went up to the embassy in Peking, sometimes as a king's messenger with one letter. By train. It was German-made and very comfortable.

'Things had settled down in 1920-22. I came back by boat on a six and half weeks-long journey. On my way I called in at Hong Kong, Singapore, Malacca and Ceylon.' [Malacca is now part of Malaysia while Ceylon is Sri Lanka.] It had taken him eight weeks to reach China on the outbound journey.

In 1924 he had married Elsie Catling in West Ham, then part of Essex. The couple arrived in Leatherhead in 1930 and had lived at first in St Mary's Road before building a bungalow at the top of Windmill Drive. They had had a son and a daughter. He had remarried his second wife, Caroline McLead, in 1964. She had two daughters, both living in Leatherhead. They had nine grandchildren between them. The garden had eventually got rather on top of them and they had decided to move down to a flat around 1972.

After retirement, he had organised the Leatherhead branch of the Workers Educational Association (WEA), acting as secretary for 19 years and then chairman for the last year before giving it up in the mid-1970s. He said: 'I passed it on to some very nice people from Ashted and they have kept it going since.'

Founded in 1903, the WEA is Britain's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education and also one of the country's biggest charities, delivering thousands of courses at local venues.

Walter was also secretary of the Leatherhead parish church hall after it had been extended in around 1960. He said: 'It was very small to begin with but after the extension became one of the finest - if not the finest - in the district. I believe the original hall was converted from a factory building. This improvement was made possible by the generosity of the Herbert Kempson Reeves Trust and the late Major Howard who used to live in Downside, the big house.

'I became secretary, then treasurer, then after a time both secretary and treasurer. After another five years somebody else volunteered to be secretary so I just retained the treasurership.'

He described Leatherhead back in 1930. 'At that time the Swan Inn stood on the site now occupied [in 1979] by Timothy White's and Taylor's in the High Street. A coach and horses left here daily for Worthing. Not far away at the corner of Church Street and The Crescent was a doctor's surgery in front of which was a raised pavement such as still exists in Dorking High Street, with a small shop.

'One could get a haircut for six old pence. In 1930 the bus fare from Leatherhead to Dorking was five pence and to Epsom four pence, the minimum fare on the Green Line being nine pence. A quarterly rail season ticket to Waterloo was about £4/3s/4d and to London Bridge, Holborn and Victoria about £4/10s.

'I first lived in St Mary's Road before the estate there, started about 1926, was completed. I recall the new and imposing council offices being built in 1935. Also the water softening plant near Hawks Hill.

During the Second World War, Canadian troops were billeted in and around Leatherhead. They constructed the original Young Street named after a Colonel Young and placed a bailey bridge over



Left: Clara Schumann (1819-1896) was Walter's chief influence. She died when he was aged two.

the River Mole. This has been replaced by a more permanent structure.

Some schoolchildren were also billeted in the area from parts of London but I seem to remember that they returned home when Leatherhead became vulnerable. Which reminds me that one night a bomb ignited a waterworks oil tank, brilliantly illuminating the countryside for a return raid which fortunately did not occur.

'The footpath between Downs Lane and Reigate Road was known as the Drift Way but it was incorporated in Windmill Drive in 1964 when the new estate there was built on what had been fields. The only stretch left is the path between the top of Windmill Drive and Reigate Road. Our beautiful bridge over the River Mole, which has stood the strain of traffic increasingly over many centuries, will at last have some relief when, under the new town plan, traffic thereon will be limited to buses and emergencies.

'In 1964 I had a bungalow built at the top of Windmill Drive, calling it Hedgerows, and named the approach road Hilltop Close with the approval of the then Leatherhead Urban District Council.

'The construction of the new shops, Barclays Bank and the Thorndike Theatre in Church Street replaced some very old and somewhat dilapidated properties. The Thorndike replaced the old theatre in the High Street which in spite of its smallness produced some very good plays and pantomimes.

'Similarly in the last 20 years or so the construction of new complexes, flats and maisonettes in Russell Court near the corner of Windfield and Bridge Street has improved Leatherhead immensely. Again, where there were fields we now have our nice leisure centre.'

Walter was a keen pianist and had been trained by one Amelia Goodwin in Kensington. Until a couple of years earlier he had also composed his own musical pieces, influenced by Clara Schumann.

The interview concluded with a performance of a short waltz he had written himself. At the age of 85, he still showed quite a talent. He died nearly seven years later aged 92.

LEATHERHEAD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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DORKING CONCERTGOERS AT THE DORKING HALLS

Saturday 5 March 2022 Martineau Hall 7.30pm

LEON MCCAWLEY CELEBRITY PIANO RECITAL

Haydn Sonata in E minor, HXVI/34

Mozart Rondo in A minor, K511

Mozart Sonata in D major, K576

Schubert Sonata in A major, D959

Saturday 26 March 2022 Grand Hall 7.30pm

CHAMBER PHILHARMONIC EUROPE

Corelli Concerto Grosso Op.6 No.4

Neruda Concerto for Trumpet & Orchestra in E flat major

J.S. Bach Concerto for Oboe & Violin, BWV1060

Elgar Serenade for Strings, Op.20

Rachmaninov Vocalise

Mozart Divertimento F major, K138

Saturday 14 May 2022 Martineau Hall 7.30pm

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LEATHERHEAD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY
March 2022 Newsletter

Note from the Secretary, Frank Haslam

An error, **entirely on my part**, in the production of this issue of this Newsletter means some amendments need to be drawn to your attention:

Page 2: The link to the membership form does not work.

If you are online and have yet to renew or now wish to join, please print off the form from the Membership page of our website.

Page 6: 31st March is a Thursday, not a Tuesday

Page 10: *Winfield* should be Windfield

Page 15: He lived at 3 Fairfield House, now part of the Working Mens' Club.

Should read: He lived at 3 Fairfield House, where the Working Mens' Club used to be in Upper Fairfield Road.

Page 25: *University College in 1864*

Should read University College London in 1864

This page is appended as these are points of record.