



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

*Newsletter*

*September*  
*2022*



**Edwina Vardey, one of Leatherhead's definitive historians, receives a copy of a signed tribute to her long service as coordinator of Bookham u3a Creative Writing Group from fellow writers Bill and Gillian Whitman. She retired earlier this year after inspiring aspirant creative writers since the 1980s. She edited the *History of Leatherhead*, first published by the L&DLHS in 1988 and again in 1991. Many of her local oral history interviews for that book have appeared in this *Newsletter* over the past six years and some can be heard and read on our website archive.**

## INDEX TO ARTICLES

Title	Page
Editorial	3
Chairman's Report	4
News from the Museum: Retrospective on John Ainley	5
Historic Map: Fetcham Park in Transition	8
Correction	9
Obituary: Gordon Knowles	10
Heritage Weekend: Barnes Wallis Exhibition	12
Heritage Weekend: Fetcham Park House/St Mary's Church	13
News Feature: Survival and History of the 465 Bus Route	14
Lecture Report: Friends of the River Mole	17
Local Personality Feature: Josephine Sanca	25
Local Personality Feature: Rev John Youl	29
Local Personality Feature: Thomas Ross Ruxton	31
Local Personality Feature: Moggs of 18th century Surrey	33
Local Personality Feature: Bernard Oswell	34
Leatherhead Classic: Letherhead and its Legends	35
Officers of the Society	38
Dorking Concertgoers Advert	40

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### 2022 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

**Ordinary: £20. Friends of Museum: £5.**

A renewal form is enclosed with this *Newsletter*. Your subscription supports the Museum and funds this quarterly *Newsletter*. The 2022 membership year began 1 January.



**EDITORIAL**

The L&DLHS has always had many strengths and this quarter's *Newsletter* shows just how varied they remain, even though activities have been fewer than in earlier years.

The Museum's central place in our role is clearly reinforced by the current retrospective of the work of John Ainley, a fascinating figure who led and inspired local artists to exhibit their work over many years. He had a remarkable talent as the three speakers made clear to a packed Museum garden at the launch of the retrospective this summer. A visit to Hampton Cottage before the exhibition ends next month is a must for both art and history lovers.

Also in this *Newsletter* are a belated tribute to former L&DLHS stalwart Gordon Knowles, and a new category, the Local Personality Feature, focusing on the lives of individuals who have been of especial interest over the centuries. The sheer range of people and unlimited timescale opens enormous potential for this category so if you have anyone in mind with interesting stories, please do not hesitate to get in touch with one of the Society's officers if you have sufficient information for a future *Newsletter* feature.

This month sees Mole Valley's now traditional Heritage Weekend and apart from the Museum, other events taking place to note will include the Barnes Wallis Exhibition in Little Bookham and open day at Fetcham Park House with the neighbouring St Mary's Church.

Finally, I have to thank Brian Hennegan for spotting an error in the June *Newsletter* which showed a historic photo of Church Street. His keen eye noticed that the angle mentioned was wrong with the actual view shown in the opposite direction. Mea culpa, of course, but this also shows the dedication of one of our longstanding supporters. Thanks once again.

**TONY MATTHEWS**



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Society summer is traditionally taken up with outside activities, especially of course those at our Museum with its external exhibits in the pleasant garden and educational initiatives such as junior archaeology. However, other non-seasonal work continues too and in the latest quarter we have dealt with an enquiry about milestones, the age of a farmhouse, and rumours of a house of ill-repute among other matters.

I was privileged both to speak at the service of thanksgiving for Dr Fred Meynen in Leatherhead and also to attend a celebration of the life of Dr Gordon Knowles at West Horsley Place. Fred's obituary appeared in the June L&DLHS *Newsletter* and Gordon's is in this edition on Page 12. Both were enormous figures within the Society and are sorely missed.

You will not be surprised to hear that at time of writing some of our Executive Committee members had suffered attacks of the latest variant of Covid-19. We wish them all a quick recovery.

Ashtead Rotary offers annual awards to groups and individuals and I proposed the Ashtead Burial Ground Management System which was accepted. You can try this out at <https://ashtead.burialgrounds.co.uk/mapmanagement/#/> Perhaps you know someone who is buried there. Locations and other information are available from the burial register. In addition, if you can think of other nominations that might be made by the Society across our area please let us know at any time.

Our Museum at Hampton Cottage now has an enthusiastic Curator elect, Cathy Brett, and I look forward to her confirmation at our next Executive Committee meeting. You can read opposite about the current retrospective exhibition of paintings by John Ainley, founder and longstanding organiser of the Leatherhead Art Club who was involved for over 40 years. Some of his paintings are on Pages 6 and 7. The subjects are partly local and partly done during family holidays. Some of the local ones could do with further identification so please do visit before the exhibition comes to an end next month if you can assist with this.

**JOHN ROWLEY**

## NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

### RETROSPECTIVE ON THE WORK OF JOHN AINLEY

The exhibition of the work of local painter John Ainley was opened by his daughter Liz Wheeler, David Eaton and Gordon Elsey on 23 July. John Anthony Ainley (1931-2004) (right), artist and headmaster, ran Leatherhead Art Club for 44 years after founding it in 1960, as chairman and then secretary until standing down in 2004 for health reasons.

His smooth running of the club made it possible for many people to enjoy painting. John organised events, painting trips, classes and exhibitions. There were regular shows at the then Thorndike Theatre until 1996 when the club started exhibiting in empty shops, Sainsburys, the Letherhead Institute, Bourne Hall in Ewell and Denbies Vineyard in Dorking.

At the same time, he was headmaster of St Phillips School in Chessington from 1968-1995. A special school for pupils with learning difficulties, the children were encouraged to be artistic and imaginative. The school was recognised as a centre of excellence by Kingston Council and one schools inspector donated his entire retirement bursary to what he said was the borough's best school.

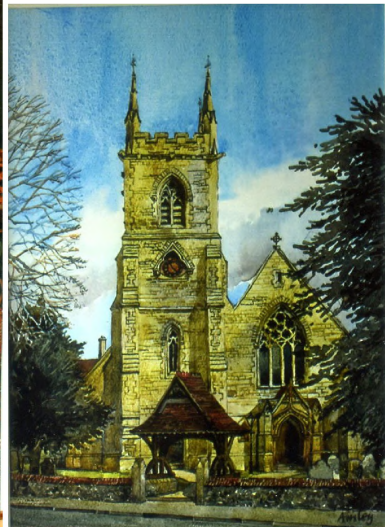
John Ainley published a widely used book on early years teaching after working alongside St Phillips's speech and language therapists. In 1967 he also established an annual art exhibition which showed the artwork of school pupils from throughout the borough. A huge event, this attracted hundreds of visitors.

His love of painting was clear but he was also an expert calligrapher and illustrator, a brilliant self-taught pianist, and an amateur but successful architect who drew plans and designed his own family home, built in Leatherhead in the late 1970s. He enjoyed travel and all forms of entertainment. The retrospective covers all the areas of his life. It includes up to a dozen exhibits from various local sources. See some examples on Pages 6 and 7. The exhibition continues until October.





*Above: St Giles School,  
Ashted. Left: A balcony.  
Below: St Mary's Church,  
Ewell.*



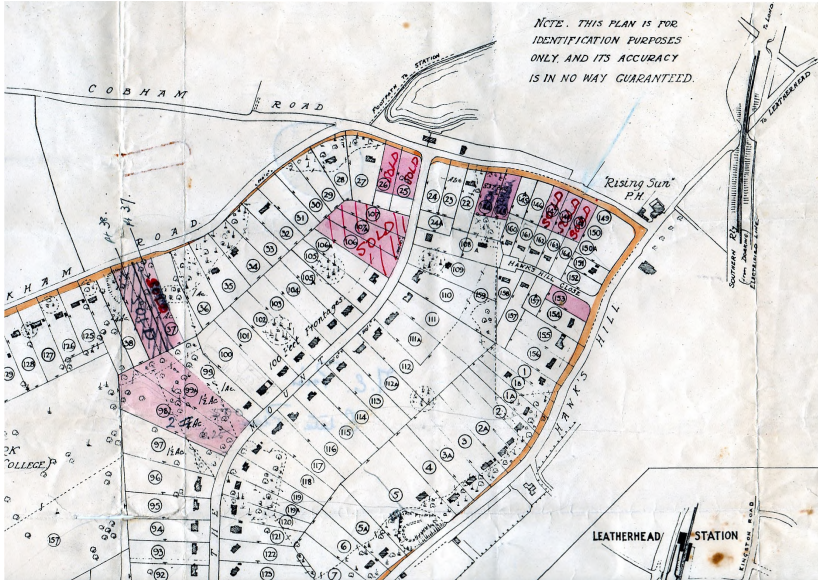


*Above: Gravel Hill, Leatherhead. Below: Mickleham.*



# HISTORIC MAP

## FETCHAM PARK IN TRANSITION



Earlier this year Fetcham archivist Alan Pooley received documents including the map above, dated February 1925, confirming the layout of plots and new roads originally proposed for the development of the Fetcham Park estate. Later maps in the Museum collection show plots that had been sold and suggested that sales were sluggish. The newly created Southern Railway was then electrifying tracks and altering the layout at the stations to use only the LB&SCR station not a second one seen on the key plan

The map also shows the remaining Fetcham Park which, although acquired by Percy Harvey in 1924, was not formally sold to Rev Wilkey until 1928 although he had already established Badingham College there a year or so earlier having moved from Badingham in Suffolk. An accompanying prospectus refers to a sports club with a bowling green which is shown on the map but never materialised.

**Continued on Page 24.**





## CORRECTION

The June *Newsletter* wrongly described the above photo from the Museum collection as showing the view from Church Street, Leatherhead, looking down Gimcrack Hill. In fact it shows the opposite direction as **BRIAN HENNEGAN** has pointed out.

He wrote: ‘Most of the buildings shown still stand today. These on the right-hand side are still there, opposite the Museum. On the left-hand side, the buildings as far as the Museum, are still there, except the cottage on the first left has had a facelift, I estimate during the late 1960s early 70s.

‘The Museum is still easily identifiable by the lower bay window. The building was vastly renovated when the Society acquired it. Left of centre right, you might just make out a wall located on the other side of The Crescent. This was part of a wall that surrounded a large detached house. The lower portion of Church Street, where the trees are, was redeveloped in the 1930s. The Crescent cinema was built in 1938 together with a pair of offices on its left and right hand side. The cinema was later transformed into the Thorndike Theatre in 1968. The shops and cafe were erected around the 1980s.’

# OBITUARY

## GORDON KNOWLES (1928 – 2022)

The March 2022 *L&DLHS Newsletter* noted the loss of Gordon Knowles, longstanding L&DLHS member, trustee and office-holder, who died on 18 January after a short illness. PETER TARPLEE, former L&DLHS vice-president, has now provided the following obituary.

Gordon was a very active member of the Surrey Industrial History Group who served on their committee for many years. After our founding chairman, Alan Crocker, became president of the group, Gordon was elected chairman, a post he held for many years.

Gordon grew up in Stourport and Kidderminster and his early employment was in the steel industry. He later turned to education and worked at Kingston Polytechnic which was his introduction to Surrey. He then moved to Strathclyde University for a number of years. With his wife Pam, who died in March 2014, he then moved to Great Bookham as he had been appointed principal of Horsley Towers, at that time a training establishment for staff of the Electricity Council.

Gordon soon involved himself in local activities, particularly those involving technology and its history. He was drawn into membership of the Surrey Industrial History Group and the L&DLHS. He duly became chairman of SIHG and L&DLHS president from 2007-2013.

Continuing his interest in industrial history, he was soon an active member of the Newcomen Society and the Greater London Industrial Archaeological Society. Following retirement, his involvement in all of his societies increased.

He also combined his interests with his experience and gave many lectures on industrial and transport history. Over the years these were very popular and a number of people owe their knowledge of and interest in these subjects to the excellence of Gordon's talks at the Leatherhead Institute.



*Above: Gordon and Pam Knowles. Below left: A younger Gordon. Below right: Horsley Towers where a tribute was held, attended by Revd Alan Jenkins of St Nicolas Church, Great Bookham, and where Gordon was once principal of a training centre.*



## HERITAGE WEEKEND

### **NOT JUST BOUNCING BOMBS! SIR BARNES WALLIS AND HIS ASTOUNDING INVENTIONS**

No-one better fits this year's Heritage Week theme of *Astounding Inventions* than Sir Barnes Wallis, so Mole Valley Council has requested another special exhibition about him at the Tithe Barn on Manor Farm in Little Bookham.

Taking place on the weekend 10-11 September, it will be open from 9am-5pm on Saturday and 10am-4pm on Sunday. It follows an earlier exhibition

three years ago to mark 40 years since the inventor's death. However this event will be slightly different, focusing on his astounding inventions.

Organised by Vivien White, the exhibition is being held by Effingham Residents Association, assisted by Brooklands Museum and the Barnes Wallis Foundation as well as the inventor's family.

Barnes Wallis lived in Effingham and is buried at St Lawrence Church close to the Tithe Barn itself. He is best known for inventing the bouncing bomb that was used in The Dambusters raid in 1943 during World War 2. However he also came up with other astounding inventions, some of which were way ahead of their time.

Short films and documentaries and a recorded interview about him with his daughter, Elisabeth, will also be shown. The exhibition will be held in the impressive 15th century Grade 2 listed Tithe Barn, formerly associated with All Saints Church which will also be open. The barn is one of the largest in Surrey at 4500 sq ft.



Refreshments will be available within the barn or in the terraced courtyard garden which has been recreated from photographs taken in the 1920s.

Families with children are very welcome. Limited parking available on site, with further space available at the neighbouring Manor House School in Manor House Lane.

## **FETCHAM PARK HOUSE AND ST MARY'S CHURCH**

Fetcham Park House and St Mary's Church next door will both be open 10 am - 5 pm, Saturday, 10 September for Heritage Open Day. The church alone will also open 2pm - 5pm on Sunday, 11 September and 9.30 am - 4pm on Saturday, 17 September.

A special brochure has been created for use in archives for the partners and the interest of neighbours and visitors. Among points of interest in the house are five baroque-style wall and ceiling murals by Louis Laguerre (1663-1721) with mythological themes (see above), painted in oil on plaster. There are also six decorative panels painted in oil on wood. They are believed to date from around the time the house was built between 1700 and 1705.

The murals have suffered some damage over time, particularly in the late 1960s when the house was left empty and not maintained. Some vandalism occurred. However they are not considered to have suffered from over-restoration. Paul Tsangari carried out conservation work in January 2019.



## NEWS FEATURE

### **SURVIVAL AND HISTORY OF THE 465 BUS ROUTE**

Members who use the 465 bus service between Kingston, Leatherhead and Dorking will have been relieved to find its continued operation this year as it could have ceased in April, ending public transport between the north and south of Mole Valley.

In 2017 a five-year agreement was reached between Transport for London and Surrey County Council that the first section of the route between Kingston and Leatherhead would be funded by Transport for London and the second between Leatherhead and Dorking by SCC. Each manages its own sections and they share the fare revenue proportionally under the overall route management of Transport for London.

Last August SCC announced that it wished to renew the agreement after all and would continue its share of the funding but no announcement confirming this was made subsequently. Fortunately the service has continued anyway.

The existence of a London bus service outside the capital has always seemed an oddity. Indeed, it travels a shorter distance within London than it does in Surrey. The capital's bus network has plenty of anomalies but at least the majority actually are London bus routes.

The 465 travels deep into the Surrey countryside after it leaves Kingston's boundary at Malden Rushett to make its way across Leatherhead to its terminus in Dorking. That is some 21 miles from Charing Cross.

The service started life in 1991 as a non-London bus route when it ran from London and Horsham. Since then the route has had many changes and one could say a chequered history.

In 1997 it was designated the service from Teddington via Kingston to Leatherhead and Dorking and was operated by the firm London & Country. Tellings-Golden Miller took over in 1999 and the route was then diverted at Leatherhead via Great Bookham to Effingham Woodlands Road but that was withdrawn 18 months later except for two peak journeys. After another six months, those peak journeys were also withdrawn.

In 2006 the Teddington-Kingston section was curtailed and in 2007





the route passed to Arriva Guildford & West Surrey via Leatherhead to Dorking for what turned out to be just two years.

In October 2009 Transport for London signed a new contract for route 465 with Metrobus. That lasted for three years until the route was re-assigned to Epsom Coaches subsidiary Quality Line, which became in turn a subsidiary of the Paris-based RATP Group in 2012.

In 2020 the 465 route was transferred to another RATP subsidiary, London United, but at least some stability had been achieved, with RATP subsidiaries continuing to operate on behalf of Transport for London for the past 10 years.

However, in 2017, Transport for London proposed to shorten the route at Leatherhead. This would have killed off public transport altogether for Mickleham and undermined Dorking's transport too.

The residents of Mickleham and surrounding areas got the support of Surrey County Council to oppose this change. As the stretch from Leatherhead to Dorking is entirely within Surrey and it was in the interests of local residents to keep the route as it was, Transport for London and Surrey County Council reached the five-year agreement that has now been continued.





## LECTURE REPORT

### FRIENDS OF THE RIVER MOLE

L&DLHS returned to both local natural history and geology on 10 May when SUE and NIGEL BOND gave their presentation about the current poor state of the River Mole. By highlighting all of the threats to its health they were aiming to encourage much greater involvement in its protection and restoration.

The River Mole's catchment area covers 487 square kilometres of largely rural land. It rises in the hills of north Sussex near Ruspur and flows northwards past Crawley and around Gatwick, to be joined by Salfords Stream from Reigate, on to Dorking and the Mole Gap through the North Downs, to Leatherhead, Cobham and Esher, finally joining the Thames at Molesey. Overall it is around 50 miles long and falls approximately 95 metres from source to the Thames.

The river rises on the mainly clay Weald and flows through the lower greensand hills and along the east-west upper greensand and gault clay valley running along the foot of the chalk North Downs. It then flows through the gap in the Downs at Dorking and Box Hill, across the chalk to Leatherhead and Fetcham where a narrow band of sand and gravel separates the chalk from the clay of the London Basin.

Most of the Mole's tributaries are south of the Downs. There are none on the chalk although dry river valleys at Polesden and Mickleham show there were once significant streams in those valleys. There are a few on the London clay such as the Rye Brook from Ashted and the stream from Bookham Common.

Rain falling on the clay areas quickly runs off the land, making its way by ditches and streams to join the main river. Most of the rain falling on the permeable chalk makes its way underground to become part of the large volume of water stored within the chalk aquifer. Where the permeable chalk meets the impermeable clay, water emerges from the aquifer as springs, these forming the spring line along that geological boundary.

Some river water also disappears into the chalk through 'swallow



***Above: This idyllic image of the River Mole hides a sad reality of pollution and declining biodiversity because of human activities.***

holes' in the river bed between Burford Bridge and Norbury Park Farm, only to re-emerge from springs at Thorncroft and Bluebird Island. In extremely dry summers like 1976 and this year all the water may disappear in this way.

The River Mole and the spring line have been important to people living in or passing through our area from the earliest times of local settlement. In 2009, SES Water was laying a new water main across land near the spring-fed Fetcham Mill Pond on the Mole river terrace. Tom Munnery of Surrey County Archaeological Unit undertook a watching brief and then a more detailed investigation when it was clear there was something worth investigating. In all, he recovered more than 5000 pieces of flint at Fetcham Springs. Around 12,000 years ago this was a late Upper Palaeolithic or early Mesolithic site-where hunter-gathers had stopped to knap flint to make or repair hunting equipment.

This is now realised to be an extremely rare type of site regionally or even nationally. Imagine spring-fed Fetcham Mill Pond covering a larger area than now, surrounded by reed-beds and close to the River Mole in its marshy flood plain. For thousands of years, the

spring-fed pond would be an accessible ice-free source of fresh water, attracting a rich range of wildlife as well as human hunters and fishers.

In the Bronze and Iron Ages, a broad ancient east-west trackway ran parallel to the spring line in summer, close to the springs for watering beasts and people. Was it used for communal festivals or markets? In winter, on the edge of the chalk - keeping clear of the mud - farmsteads existed at intervals along the trackway such as the Iron Age farm close to today's Bocketts Farm.

The trackway forded the Mole at Leatherhead on the spring line where the river is wide and shallow, and the ground rises quickly on the north side, climbing above the flood plain. The name Leatherhead may come from *Letorito*, meaning 'the grey ford' in Celtic British.

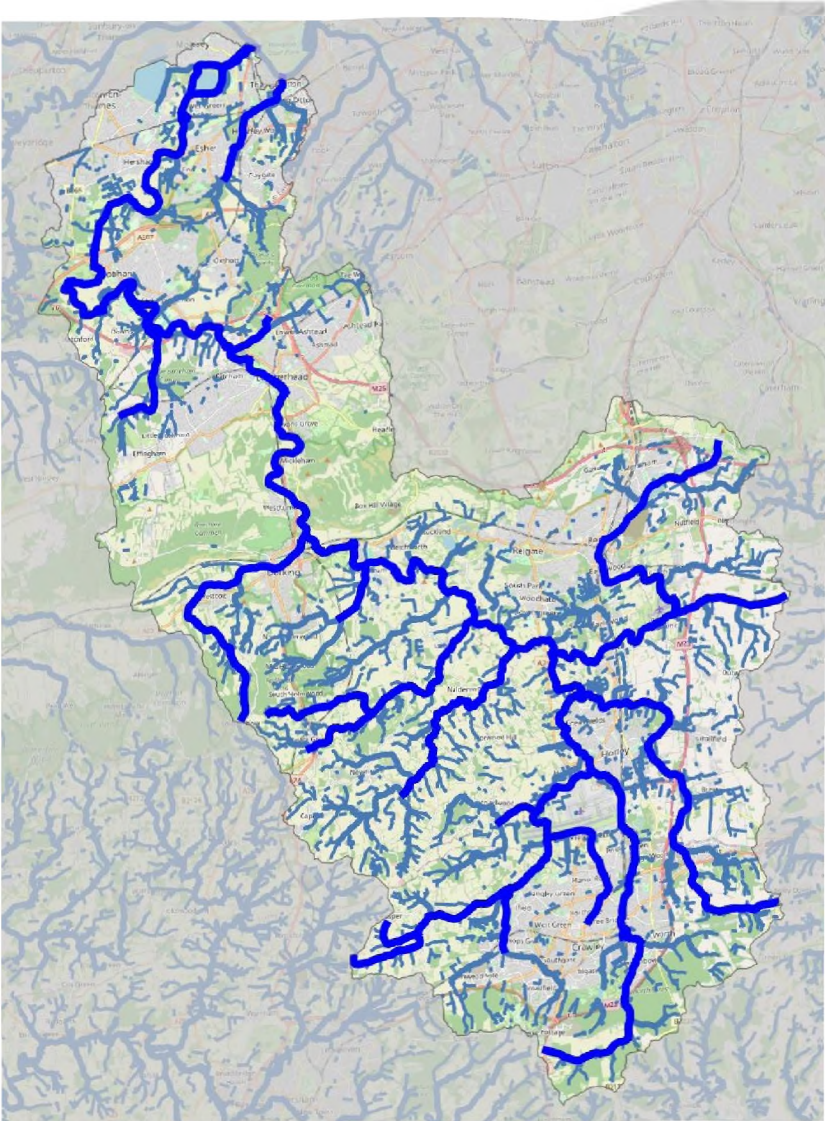
Stane Street, the main Roman road from Chichester to London, passed through the Mole Gap and crossed the river near Burford Bridge before climbing on to the chalk downs. One could expect to find a *mansio* in this area every 20 kilometres or so for lodging, bathing and changing horses, always sited close to water.

Finds of Roman coins and other artefacts indicate the spring line route was still well-used at that time and was very likely to have had continuing importance as a drove-road with markets and festivals on the way to and from Londinium.

Some springs were of special spiritual significance. This was so at Ewell and possibly other sites too. There are likely to have been several villas and farms in the area including Ashtead Common, Ashtead St Giles, Pachenesham, and Hawks Hill. There was certainly industrial activity at the tileworks at Ashtead Common.

In Anglo-Saxon times the spring line became the focus for settlement. Saxon farms have passed their *-ham* names on to our own villages. There was a 6th century cemetery at Watersmeet and a much larger 7th century cemetery on Hawks Hill, first discovered in 1758 when the turnpike was being laid. The trackway and *Letorito* ford were still used but possibly with less through-traffic.

The Domesday Book has entries for the Bookhams, Fetcham, Pachenesham, Thorncroft and Ashtead listing their ownership and assets before and after the Norman Conquest. The church at Leret (Leatherhead) is also mentioned. Ten Mills listed in the Domesday



***Above: The Mole rises in the hills of north Sussex at the bottom of this map and flows northwards around Gatwick, on to Dorking through the North Downs, to Leatherhead, Cobham and Esher, joining the Thames at Molesey at the top. It is some 50 miles long.***

Book would have been water mills driven by the Mole or a tributary stream including one driven by Fetcham Springs. People may have settled close to the river crossing from the 11th century with the town of Leatherhead developing in the 12th and early 13th centuries. The first reference to a bridge at Leatherhead is in the 1280s.

As the town and villages grew, large estates were established close to the river. Leatherhead was famous for the quality of its trout. Around 1680, John Aubury wrote: 'In Sir Thomas Bludworth's (Lord Mayor of London and owner of Thorncroft) orchard is a pond, consisting of several springs, boiling out of the sands, where are excellent trouts.'

A directory of 1791 described the Swan Hotel as 'a very genteel house with good accommodation'. Trout from the River Mole was one of the specialities served.

In the earliest times water used would be primarily from the river and springs. As the town and villages developed, wells became the main source. Larger houses also collected water in brick-built cisterns underground and these are sometimes found today by people building a patio or home extension.

In 1884 the Leatherhead and District Water Company provided piped water from a 12-inch borehole 200 feet deep. A second borehole was added in 1898. The original pumping station was replaced in 1935.

There are now four boreholes and the Elmer Treatment Works. Boreholes were supplemented by water from Fetcham Springs from 1941. The L&DLHS book *A History of Fetcham* (published 1998) says: '*The quality of the River Mole's water discourages its use as a possible source for domestic use. The principal contaminant is sewage effluent from processing plants upstream and in the low flow of summer this can form up to 60% of the total flow in places.*'

Today the River Mole is much loved, at the heart of our local communities, and a focal point for Mole Valley's Transform Leatherhead plan. It has glorious wildlife and views, is a beautiful place to walk and play, and includes a local nature reserve and National Trust land. It is used for fishing, paddling, swimming and canoeing.

But it is also a river fighting for its life. It has a poor ecological status



***Above: In 1884 the Leatherhead and District Water Company provided piped water from a 12 inch borehole 200 feet deep. The original pumping station was replaced by this one in 1935. The Brutalist architecture is typical of the period.***

and is suffering declining aquatic and bird life. It contains heavily polluted water unfit for human contact.

Nationwide, a report entitled *Troubled Water* published in 2021 following research by the RSPB and wildlife trusts, says 88% of people agree our rivers are a national treasure and 43% think our rivers are in good condition. Yet in reality, only 14% of England's rivers are of good ecological status; there are negative effects on invertebrates, plants, birds and mammals, and many species face extinction.

The Environment Agency assesses ecological condition on a five-point scale with grading of Bad / Fail, Poor, Moderate, Good and High. The River Mole from Horley to Hersham is graded Moderate overall, Poor on ammonia and phosphates, and Fails on at least three priority hazardous substances. Portsmouth University environmental science students have found *E.coli* in water at the Stepping Stones and points upstream.

So what is damaging the Mole? Nitrates and phosphates from sewage

and agricultural run-off are major culprits but in addition there is untreated sewage which is really supposed to come only from storm overflows.

Thames Water data for 2019-21 is very worrying. Its Storm Overflow Improvement Objectives for Thames Valley and London state a 50% overall reduction in duration by year end 2030 and 80% reduction in duration within 'sensitive' catchments by year end 2030. But its baseline year is 2020 which turned out to be its worst ever year. For the Mole catchment a 37% reduction was already achieved at year end 2021. Surely it would be reasonable to expect them to achieve more in nine years!

In March 2022, OFWAT said: 'We asked companies to set out what they see as the key root causes for why their wastewater treatment works might not be operating in line with .. their environmental permits.' Example root causes that companies described included failure of equipment, insufficient capacity, maintenance issues, incorrect set up of site controls or data monitors, staff errors. Only two of these might require significant investment to fix!

Other pollutants include domestic misconnections (at the Rye Brook for example), small (private) sewage treatment, road and garden run-off, misuse of drains, industrial leaks (for example from Gatwick airport), Reigate Fire Training Centre, and insecticides from flea-treatments for dogs which kill river invertebrates.

The Environment Agency has responsibility for safeguarding and can impose penalties for infractions but its staffing has been so badly cut back that it is unable to do so. Statistically, an average farm in England can expect a visit once every 263 years!

OFWAT is responsible for the performance of water companies and legal action is planned to hold it to account. The Government has ultimate responsibility for river health but has not, to date, shown any appetite for action unless pressurised by public opinion.

Friends of the River Mole is becoming one such pressure group. There have been Friends of the River Mole groups at Leatherhead and Molesey for several years. Volunteers have been doing important work such as removing non-native invasive species including Floating Pennywort and Himalayan Balsam. They have also been supporting Surrey Wildlife Trust's riverfly and phosphate testing

campaigns and participating in projects to restore stream channels to a more natural state.

Friends of the River Mole have identified these as first priorities:

- Become a larger, catchment-wide group.
- Develop a water quality testing programme.
- Learn from other environmentalist organisations.
- Seek active support from Mole Catchment Partnership and the Environment Agency.
- Recruit and train citizen scientists.
- Establish communication channels with Thames Water.
- Engage with local community organisations, councillors and MPs.
- Review and comment on plans issued for public consultation.
- Use citizen science test data to influence decision-making.

For more information and news go to [www.dorking-climate-emergency.net](http://www.dorking-climate-emergency.net) or e-mail [FORMRiverwatch@vahoo.com](mailto:FORMRiverwatch@vahoo.com). Act as our eyes and ears on the River Mole and other streams. If you see pollution please record (date, time, appearance, photos, video) and report it – to FORM and Environment Agency 0800 80-70-60.

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## FETCHAM PARK IN TRANSITION

### **Continued from Page 8.**

A handwritten specification mentions ‘Leatherhead House, April 1926’ at the front.

The documents were supplied by Jane Cain of Carentan, Normandy, but who lived in Great Bookham as a child from 1965 to 1975. Her parents were L&DLHS members. Her grandfather had circled plot 3A on the 1925 map, his own house. By 1930 he had bought the bottom half of plot 3 from the Inglis family next door and planted an orchard.

Jane’s father and uncle visited the estate that was being built in the 1970s through the bottom of all the gardens in Hawks Hill and The Mount. They walked around what had been their garden, pointing out the former locations of the shed, fruit cage and so on.



## LOCAL PERSONALITY FEATURE

### THE STORY OF JOSEPHINE SANCA (1902-1987)

**CATHY LEWER** tells the fascinating story of her grandmother, Josephine Terese Wilhelmina Sanca, whose death in a freak weather accident appeared in the *Leatherhead Advertiser*.

On a very windy Friday in March 1987, an 85-year-old pensioner, Mrs Josephine Sanca, was out shopping near the Swan Centre car park in Leatherhead when she was swept off her feet and thrown up into the air, landing on her head. She died three hours later at Epsom Hospital.

Resident at a flat in Kingsbrook for many years, she had been a keen gardener, had worked part-time at the local Oxfam shop and for Meals on Wheels, and been a volunteer tea-maker at Leatherhead Hospital. A devout Catholic, she had attended mass regularly, arranged flowers in the church, helped with church bazaars, jumble sales and other fundraising activities. Her funeral was held at the Catholic Church in Garlands Road, Leatherhead.

But this conventional Surrey lifestyle masked a rather more dramatic background. To start, Josephine, my grandmother, was born illegitimately in 1902 at Atzgersdorf, Vienna in Austria-Hungary. More about her youth later.

In the early 1930s, she was working in England as a domestic servant for the Douglass family of Bleak House, Torwood Lane, Warlingham, Surrey. Percival T Douglass (1886-1949) was managing director of the Furness Shipping Company. His wife Jane was niece of founder Christopher Furness, and from 1912 the firm had been run by her brother, Stephen Wilson Furness, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet.

The 1939 census shows my grandmother Josephine at Bleak House, together with the Douglass family and three other servants. They spent their time between there and Rotterdam, regularly travelling by steam yacht, a journey my grandmother never enjoyed.

In a letter dated 14 May 1941, Josephine told her family on the continent that she was to be married the following March. She used an office address at 35 Alhambra House, 29 Charing Cross Road,



*Above and left: Two images of Josephine Sanca in her younger days.*

London. The wedding never happened but she fell pregnant in 1943 and her only child, my mother Maureen, was born in March 1944 in Guildford. Josephine later told her that her father had been an airman who was killed during the war. A DNA test long afterwards showed he was an Irish-American born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. RAF Kenley (now Kenley Aerodrome) was close to Bleak House but we have no further information about him or the circumstances.

Whatever happened, Josephine's status as an unmarried mother was unquestioned and she kept my mother with her. She always called herself 'Mrs Sanca' and my mother knew nothing more until she herself got married in 1964 and saw her birth certificate for the first time.

When Maureen was just two or three, Josephine began working as

***Above: Presbytery and First Catholic School, Leatherhead.***

a cook and housekeeper for the Harris family at Rowhurst Hill, a house in Oxshott Road. A few years later, she moved to the Presbytery in Garlands Road, Leatherhead, and Maureen was sent to board at Merrow Grange Convent School, in Guildford, returning during school holidays.

Tramps would sometimes stop at the kitchen door of the Presbytery and Josephine would fill their billy cans with tea and give them sandwiches and any clothes the priests no longer needed. After she retired, she rented a house in Ashted, by the pond in Barnett Wood Lane. When my mother Maureen married my father Robin Lewer, this became their family home. They had three children, including me. My grandmother moved into a council flat at Kingsbrook, Rye Brook Road, where she lived for the rest of her life.

So for more than half a century my grandmother Josephine lived in Surrey. Yet she never forgot her continental origins and took my mother across Europe by train to visit her cousins and aunt in Vienna, and to the Expo '58 in Brussels. She also visited Lourdes.

So what sent her to England? Her own mother, Josefa Sanca (1879-1942) was born in Budapest, and her father was a driver of the Trans-Siberian Express. He was Jewish and would have liked to take Josefa to a Jewish life in Russia but she refused. It is said that Josefa's mother, born 1852 in Rzeszów, Poland, was the illegitimate child of a Polish baroness and her riding instructor. While that may

or may not be true, a cousin, Otto Seychovsky, did become head housekeeper at the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, where he had an apartment for many years. His granddaughter still works there today.

Josefa purchased a house in Střelice, just outside Brno in Moravia. She married a local man, Jan Trčka, and they lived there with her Polish-born mother. Josefa's illegitimate daughter Josephine remained in Vienna at the age of five and was raised by her aunt and god-mother, Katharina Seychovsky, Otto's mother.

In 1922, aged 17, Josephine travelled to Říčany in Bohemia, perhaps to stay with her grandfather's family, the Šančas. A registration document dated 11 July 1922 gave her the right to stay there and she later obtained Czechoslovak citizenship. The rise of the Nazis in neighbouring Germany in 1933 intensified anti-Semitism to varying degrees in the region and although Czechoslovakia remained a free democracy until 1938, it is possible that Josephine's half Jewish background began to cause her difficulties. This may have prompted her to look for a new life in England.

On 12 March 1942, Josefa's neighbour in Střelice wrote to Katharina in Vienna informing her that Josefa had died of stomach cancer on 7 March. The letter was forwarded to Josephine in England together with her mother's will. She was left half the house in Střelice but this was kept secret from her stepfather, Jan Trčka, who knew nothing of his late wife's correspondence with her half-Jewish daughter. He stayed at the house until his death in 1958. When it was sold, Josephine received small amounts of money as most of the value was gone by then. Jan had been supporting his Polish mother-in-law there until her death in 1948 aged 96.

My grandmother Josephine never spoke about her parenthood, probably because of ingrained fear of anti-Semitism. Her own Jewish father was only revealed by the later DNA test for my mother's origins.

The fatal wind in Leatherhead in 1987 was probably a blessing for her as becoming infirm would have been difficult for my active grandmother. She was a very kind soul. Even though she must have suffered many heartaches in her life, she never complained and never stopped serving, giving her time and energy with love and a smile.

## LOCAL PERSONALITY FEATURE

**REV JOHN YOUL**  
(1777-1827)

**BRIAN BOUCHARD sent this tale of a local-born missionary who underwent some interesting experiences before ending his days as a clergyman in Australia.**

John Youl was born in Epsom in 1777 and received an English education before being sent by the London Missionary Society to Tahiti with a group of men at the age of 23.

The mission was not a great success. It was later claimed that the islanders were cannibals. Some of the missionary group lost their lives and John Youl was among all but two who were expelled from the islands. He is said to have failed to gain weight in the fattening pens and been rejected as 'a tasty meal'. He gained his freedom and supposedly that of his friends by being able to shave 30 tribesmen with his cut-throat razor without spilling a drop of blood.

The missionaries made their escape and by 1807 John Youl was at Port Jackson in New South Wales, Australia, where he met a group of non-conformists who had formed a settlement at Portland Head on the Hawkesbury River. In 1808 they formed the Portland Head Society for the Promoting of Christian Knowledge and the Education of Youth.

In 1809 the society created a small building on Ebenezer Mount to be used as a church and school. It still bears the name Ebenezer Church today and is claimed by the Presbyterians as the oldest one in Australia. John Youl became its first minister and school teacher.

In the same year he married Jane Loder, daughter of Sergeant George Loder, the local gaoler and pound-keeper. Rev Youl worked in New South Wales for six years and then returned to England where he was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Chester on 15 March 1815. In June he went on to be ordained priest by the Bishop of London and returned to New South Wales with an appointment as chaplain at Port Dalrymple in Tasmania, then known as Van Diemen's Land. He remained in Sydney until he could take up the post in 1819.



*Above: Brass plaque in memory of Rev John Youl (1777- 1827)*

chaplain of the two colonies, in 1823.

On a memorable day of Friday, 16 December 1825, Rev Youl first opened the new St John's Church for divine service. It was unfinished with the galleries unfitted and the tower incomplete.

He arrived at Port Dalrymple and then settled at George Town, making regular seasonal visits up the Tamar River to Launceston.

In 1824 the main settlement moved from George Town to Launceston where he became a resident.

The first building there used for worship was a converted blacksmith's shop. It also served as a school and court-house.

In September 1824 the foundations were begun for a church and on 28 December the corner-stone was formally laid.

The land, set in the bush away from the river and houses, had been consecrated by Rev Samuel Marsden of Sydney, the senior

Rev Youl opened a public subscription to purchase an organ. He took a particular interest in the work of a prisoner at the Launceston Gaol who created a cast-iron clock for the church. This was to become the first town clock.

Youl's parish extended to all the settled areas in the north of the island and included duties at the church, the gaol, the factories where female prisoners were detained, the schools and the condemned cell. Sadly he did not live to see his church completed as he died on 26 March 1827 aged 50. He was buried in what became the Cypress Street Burying Ground.

John and Jane Youl had nine children. The colony's government gave him 200 acres of valuable land beyond the Norfolk Plains area, and after John's death, Jane and the family moved on to their property, known as Symmons Plains. Jane died on 19 July 1877, half a century after her husband.

'The Rev Youl glass chalice' was taken there and only returned to St John's Church in 1973 when a young descendant of the family, Rev David Lewis, was appointed assistant curate there. In the church a brass plaque was erected in memory of John Youl.

## LOCAL PERSONALITY FEATURE

### THOMAS ROSS RUXTON (1915-1941)

**In the June *Newsletter*, BRIAN BOUCHARD revealed the fascinating family background of a young RAF officer killed in World War 2 and commemorated on the Ashted War Memorial. Here he returns to the hero himself.**

Thomas Ruxton, seen overleaf, was ten years old when he joined the Dragon School in Oxford in September 1925. His parents had married in the city 25 years earlier and his grandfather had had a long academic and ecclesiastical career at Wadham College.

But his father was now dead and his mother living in the Isle of Wight at the time so Oxford was not home for the boy. In 1929 he was transferred to another school in Cheltenham where he was to shine at various sports over the next five years.



In 1934 he went on to Trinity College, Cambridge, to take a degree in engineering but after two years he was offered a job in a brewery at Grantham, Lincolnshire, and was advised by his university tutor to take it up.

He was a great success there and became assistant manager at the end of his first year. He was described as 'keen, alert and with charming manners', showing every

aptitude for the business.

A keen rugby player, he also joined a flying club and in 1937 was called up for service as an RAF Voluntary Reserve pilot with the rank of sergeant (service number 745276). He made his first solo flight in May 1939.

After war broke out he returned to Cambridge for training and was commissioned as a pilot officer on 17 August 1940 for the duration of hostilities. He was delighted to be chosen as one of five members of 203 Squadron to go to the Middle East in May 1941. Britain controlled Mandate Palestine at the time.

At 06.00 hours on 29 September 1941, Blenheim Z6645 took off to carry out a routine patrol in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thomas was captain of the aircraft, accompanied by wireless operator/air gunner Sergeant William Bernard Billingsley-Dooley, and observer Sergeant Roland John Young. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after take-off and it did not return to base. Only the body of Sgt Young was recovered and it was recorded in 1948 that the two missing crew members had lost their lives at sea.

Thomas is commemorated on Ashted War Memorial because his mother had returned to live in Ashted in the early 1930s.



## LOCAL PERSONALITY FEATURE

### THE MOGGS OF 18TH CENTURY SURREY

A Jane Mogg was buried at St Giles Churchyard, Ashted, on 1 December 1758. It is not known what relation she may have been to James Mogg, corn-chandler of Epsom who, with his wife Mary, bought a messuage, yard, ground and appurtenances from Cuthbert Parkinson on 26 May 1769. Three days later, Parkinson also sold them a property in South Street.

The messuage, yard, ground and appurtenances were occupied at the time by Thomas Plummer, pastry-cook. Included in the sale too was an adjoining shop then occupied by Michael Hall, peruke (wig) maker and previously by John Eastland, another peruke maker. This was of course the age of powdered wigs. Periwigs had been worn earlier since the mid-17th century.

Mary Mogg died on 18 May 1781 and was buried at Banstead on 22 May 1781. The following year, on 24 December 1782, Jane Mogg, a 21-year-old Epsom spinster, was to marry John Marter of Long Ditton, a bachelor the same age.

Nearly ten years later, James Mogg, now a maltster living in Brewhouse Lane, Ashted (Agates Lane), died on 19 July 1792 and was interred at St Martin's Churchyard. As his wife had died years earlier, his will dated 27 February 1792 left the messuage, now occupied by John Cunningham, corn chandler, and the adjoining shop, now occupied by Thomas Plummer's widow, to Sarah Foster, wife of James Foster of Epsom, bricklayer, and to Epsom farmer John Marter and his wife Jane. On 3 June 1793 Jane was admitted to the messuage.

We may surmise that the earlier Jane Mogg may have been the mother of James and the younger Jane his daughter. Sarah might have been her elder sister as the Fosters and the Marters both inherited the property from James Mogg.

## LOCAL PERSONALITY FEATURE

### BERNARD FRETWELL OSWELL (1884-1977)

Bernard Oswald of Ashted was a leading light in the British shoe industry. A stylist for Farrina and Brevitt, he was involved with the British Quality Shoe Association Ltd.

On 2 June 1937 a report appeared in the New York newspaper *The Daily News* which read the following:

‘Bernard Oswald of London exhibits at the American

Shoe Manufacturers meeting a \$3000 jewelled pair of shoes to be worn at the coronation of King George VI by a member of the British Royal Family, and great secrecy about the wearer’s name. They are toeless red kid sandals set with diamonds and rubies. Oswald predicts the colourful coronation shoe’s influence will be worldwide, with dark coloured shoes replaced by bright red, blue, green and purple kid-skin.’

In 1942, the magazine *Country Life* read:

‘... plastic leather is being used for the Brevitt shoes, which are being styled by a great shoe expert, Mr Bernard Oswald, who was responsible for organising the exhibitions held before the war of exclusive firms in the shoe business...’

Oswell’s publicity was not entirely positive, however. Also during World War 2, it was reported that he had been fined for infringement of the blackout.



*Above: Brevitt shoes.*

**LEATHERHEAD CLASSIC**  
**LEATHERHEAD AND ITS LEGENDS**  
**By Rev Sidney Newman Sedgwick**

**This book by Rev Sedgwick (1873-1941) (right), curate of the parish church, from 1897 to 1905, was first published in 1901. It was written as a collection of nine legends and did not pretend to historical accuracy. Summaries of the first two appeared in the June *Newsletter*. Here are FRANK HASLAM's summaries of the next two. Further legends will appear in future *Newsletters*.**



**BLACK MAGIC IN EARLY 18TH CENTURY FETCHAM**

Mr Arthur Pluss of Fetcham Park, a former director of the South Sea Company who had left long before the Bubble financial scandal of the 1720s, was nevertheless unpopular locally.

He enclosed much of the common land at Fetcham and acquired several local manors in Polesden and Randalls. MP for Grimsby, he was fervently anti-smuggling and promoted an unsuccessful Excise Bill aiming to stop smuggling between Portsmouth and London via Leatherhead. Smuggling was viewed in a semi-jocular spirit by many of his gentry neighbours who were actually customers of the smugglers.

He had a devoted Indian servant called Zebedee who appeared in the baptism register at Fetcham and later took the name of Love-Pluss. Zebedee later married a Fetcham girl, prospered and was buried in Fetcham Churchyard. Pluss had rescued him from an Indian rajah who had kidnapped him from his princely father in order to torture him to death in an act of retaliation.

Pluss intercepted a wagon of contraband near Fetcham Park and captured two prominent smugglers after a fight. The next evening he was dining with the Vicar of Epsom and Zebedee was brought in to entertain the vicar and his daughters with some Eastern divination with ink.

Zebedee urged Pluss to return home, fearing all was not well. However, Pluss insisted on remaining but the divination showed fighting at Fetcham Park, under attack by the smugglers. Pluss and Zebedee quickly departed and as their coach crossed the river at Leatherhead, Zebedee set off on his own, armed with a long hollow staff which he always carried with him.

Back home at Fetcham Park, Pluss found that the smugglers had freed their imprisoned comrades, kidnapped his youngest daughter and taken the family deed and money box. His son William lay unconscious.

Zebedee's tracking skills had brought him home before Pluss and he tracked the attackers towards the hill road towards Bookham where they split into two groups, one heading towards the Roaring House Farm, the other towards Fetcham Mill Pond.

Zebedee followed the second group further towards Randall's Park and Oxshott Woods but he was spotted and chased back towards Leatherhead. When he reached the Mill Pond they were right behind him and could easily shoot him. He leaped into the pool where they thought they had him trapped but there was no sign of him. Assuming he had drowned, the smugglers made off towards Hawks Hill along the Cobham Road.

But there Pluss and the revenue officers intercepted them. A mad chase was brought to a sudden halt when the dripping wet figure of Zebedee glided towards the smugglers from the water carrying a staff and the stolen box. After a brisk fight that group of smugglers were all captured.

The other group had Pluss's kidnapped daughter with them. Zebedee followed their tracks to the Roaring House Farm which was thoroughly searched and he became suspicious when a woman at the house looked uneasy as he inspected the chimney. When he ordered the fire to be lit she revealed a cupboard leading to a contraband store built above the chimney. Pluss's daughter was discovered hidden there.

Years later, the girl's children loved to ask Zebedee how their mother had been kidnapped and how had he hidden himself in the Mill Pond. He had lain submerged, breathing through his hollow bamboo cane.

*Note: The old smuggler's route, as far as can be ascertained, seems to have run from Portsmouth to London. From the artificial caves at Puttenham, it skirted Guildford, passing through Clandon Downs, through the lonely woods to the Roaring House, and from thence by by-paths to Oxshott Caves, and so on to London. An old well on Gravel Hill was also used as a smugglers' hiding place.*

## **JUDGE JEFFREYS, 10 DECEMBER 1688, LEATHERHEAD**

The Mansion in Church Road, Leatherhead, was the home of Sir Thomas Bludworth. One day it was pouring with rain and a man dressed in a rough seafaring coat, who was evidently ill and in pain, sought entrance. It was the Lord Chancellor, Judge Jeffreys, whose daughter was married to Bludworth.

King James II had fled the country after an uprising against him and William of Orange - the future King William III - had landed at Brixham. Judge Jeffreys was being hunted down following his part in the Bloody Assizes. Jeffreys' 15-year-old daughter Susan was dying but being looked after there and he had brought her sweets bought by his butler.

While he was with Susan, word arrived that he had been betrayed and had to hide. Bludworth faced the constables who arrived with Jeffreys' butler who was now seeking the £200 reward for his master's arrest having realised who the sweets he had bought were intended for.

Bludworth had to allow the search but Jeffreys was not discovered and the constables departed for The Swan Inn for the rest of the night. However the following morning Jeffreys was found by the butler but managed to flee, riding to Epsom Common via a considerable detour through Norbury, Mickleham and Headley. He believed his pursuers would expect him to go directly to London.

Bludworth went to The Swan and delayed the departure of the constables for as long possible. They had worked for Jeffreys and despised the treacherous butler. But they nearly caught Jeffreys on Epsom Downs.

Nevertheless he managed to ride into Epsom, mingling with the

crowd at the Christmas Fair in order to escape again and hid in a barn. Two small children, Dicky Drake and Debby Duck, came into the building and saw his footprints. He revealed himself to them and befriended them. The barn was their pretend house for when they were to be married.

The pursuers approached and Jeffreys hid again. The children deceived the pursuers who went on their way. Once alone again, Dicky and Debby insisted that Jeffreys performed their marriage ceremony but they lacked a ring. Jeffreys gave them his signet ring and performed the ceremony.

He continued his journey but was eventually arrested at Wapping and taken to the Tower of London where some months later he died of his illness.

*NOTE: Interestingly the Leatherhead marriage register for 16 January 1709 includes an entry of the marriage of Richard Drake to Deborah Duck.*

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## **LEATHERHEAD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

Registered Charity No 1175119

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### DORKING CONCERTGOERS AT THE DORKING HALLS

**Saturday 22 October** Martineau Hall 7.30pm  
**VIENNA MOZART TRIO**

**Mozart** Piano Trio in G major K496 (1786)  
**Mozart** Piano Trio in C major K548 (1788)  
**Mendelssohn** Piano Trio No.2 in C minor Op.66



Vienna Mozart Trio

**Saturday 12 November** Martineau Hall 7.30pm  
**DUO BIZ'ART** FOUR HANDS, ONE PIANO  
Geoffrey Baptiste & André Roe

**Ravel** Mother Goose Suite  
**Copland** Variations on a Shaker Melody  
**Vaughan Williams** English Folk Songs Suite  
**Grieg** Norwegian Dances, Op.35  
and works by Lambert and Grainger



duo biz'art

**Saturday 21 January** Grand Hall 7.30pm  
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