



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

# *Newsletter*      *June 2022*



**Scientist Albert Einstein reads to Barbara, future sister-in-law of Leatherhead musician Joan Mulholland, and her then boss (later first husband), war hero Commander Locker-Lampson, who had given Einstein refuge from the Nazis near his Norfolk estate. See the feature on Page 25.**

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### 2022 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

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

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



## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the summer *Newsletter* which contains the usual wide selection of features material and lecture reports for this 75th anniversary year of the Society.

Sadly we have to report the passing of Fred Meynen whose immense contribution over many years not just to the Society but to Leatherhead as a whole is recognised both in the Chairman's Report and the obituary. Our feature on Leatherhead Hospital in the last edition was based entirely on his work and made a fitting additional tribute to him.

Also in this *Newsletter* is the first in a new series summarising the individual stories from *Leatherhead and its Legends*, the unique book by Rev Sedgwick (1873-1941), curate of the parish church, which was introduced to us in Frank Haslam's talk last November. The nine stories do not pretend to historical accuracy but combine fantasy with particular aspects of Leatherhead which still strike a note of familiarity. This edition mentions the parish church organ and the Running Horse inn, the latter followed by a poem about the legendary owner Elynor Rummyng. More stories will follow in September.

We must thank Brian Bouchard in particular for his extensive contributions to this edition including that poem but also the Edward Lear piece and the curious story of the Ruxtons which emerged from a conventional enquiry.

I have to mention too our unique cover picture of Albert Einstein who never came to Leatherhead as far as we know but whose temporary refuge from the Nazis in England was assisted by the future sister-in-law of Joan Mulholland, a local musician. This is probably the only time the world's most famous scientist will ever be featured in our *Newsletter* so the opportunity could not be missed.

**TONY MATTHEWS**



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I must first refer to the passing of Dr Fred Meynen, a long-standing trustee of this Society. In a full obituary on Page 7 you will find further details of his long medical career in general practice, supporting Leatherhead Hospital and other activities including horticulture. He recently sponsored the addition of a well-head to the medieval shaft in our Museum garden, and his last act was to provide his selection of old surgical tools for an exhibition at the annual SyAS event. Thank you Fred, for all that you have done for the Society over so many years.

In losing Fred Meynen, we have lost a valued trustee. However, we have found another in Professor Patricia Wiltshire and also our two Museum Managers, Peter Humphreys and Duncan Macfarlane. Welcome all to the Society trustees.

While the Covid-19 pandemic transitions to endemic - and as I write, the Office for National Statistics is reporting a fall-off in infections - we are bound still to be careful on behalf of our members and stewards. As this downward trend continues we are mostly able to carry out our regular activities normally, including talks back in the Abraham Dixon Hall at the Leatherhead Institute. We hope we have conducted our final Zoom-only meeting but while we expect to be back to normal with face to face meetings, those people who feel particularly at risk can continue to participate from home using the Zoom facility as they will be hybrid meetings.

The collecting of Ashted Pottery in Ashted and widely across our area has been prolific over the years. Next year is the centenary of the business employing and eventually housing up to 40 disabled ex-servicemen who needed worthwhile employment following service in the First World War. I am aware there is considerable enthusiasm for a celebration, bringing together several private collections for a three-day event in Ashted in April 2023. Any member interested in participating, please contact me in the first instance for more information.

**JOHN ROWLEY**

## NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

The upstairs rear room, formerly the office, has a new display, *Leatherhead in Old Photos*, selected from those held in the Priory archive and rotated with others as the season progresses. Many have not been displayed before. See three of them below.

The exhibition is a mix of about 50 photos showing local landscapes, businesses and people ranging over the period 1850 to 2000. Comparisons between the world depicted and today's landscape shows the visual decline over the last century.



***Left: Section of Stane Street, the Roman road, at Tyrrells Wood, Leatherhead, showing the original terracing which would be destroyed by the South Orbital Road.***

***Right: The original Leatherhead Fire Brigade.***



***Left: A view of Church Street in 1895. Some buildings are clearly recognisable but the leafy stretch on Gimcrack Hill has largely gone.***

## MUSEUM STEWARDS' TRAINING DAY



*Left:  
Training  
day for the  
Museum  
stewards  
on 23 April.  
Photos by  
Robin  
Christian.*



## ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

Three boxes of medieval pottery were collected from our stores this spring for analysis by the pottery group of Surrey Archaeological Society (SyAS). Lyn Spencer organised this year's dig at Rowhurst, Leatherhead, in May, staffed by experienced SyAS volunteers.

The L&DLHS had a stand at the SyAS Symposium in April where our representatives displayed a fine collection of disconcerting medical paraphernalia donated by the late former L&DLHS chairman, Dr Fred Meynen, which generated much interest. The stand also had display boards from the Museum and some of our published books.

The Symposium talks covered everything from prehistoric subjects to an 18th century gunpowder works. Rebecca Haslam spoke on Roman roads in Southwark where new discoveries suggest the possible importance of a Thames ford at Vauxhall during the earliest phases of Roman occupation.

**NIGEL BOND**

## OBITUARY

### DR FRED MEYNEN (1932-2022)



Dr Fred Meynen, former chairman of the L&DLHS and still a trustee on the Executive Committee, died on Sunday, 3 April at Epsom Hospital after a long illness. He was a month short of his 90th birthday.

Fred held the fort as temporary chairman from 2015 to 2016 but was crucially involved with the Society and the Museum from 1980s onwards. He was still programme secretary until last year and remained keen to propose guided walks and other activities until the end.

Fred Meynen was born 15 May 1932 to Dutch parents living in Hampstead garden suburb. His father Derk worked for Shell and moved to London from The Hague with Fred's mother, Tia. They had one other son, ten years older than Fred and disabled.

World War 2 dominated Fred's childhood and he recalled the Blitz and guns on Hampstead Heath firing at German aircraft. After schooling he studied civil engineering at Imperial College but took a holiday job as a ward orderly at Stoke Mandeville Hospital which transformed his life and inspired a permanent dedication to medicine.

Stoke Mandeville was world famous for treating spinal injuries. Fred learned that patients elsewhere who were unable to move would often die from pressure sores, gangrene and sepsis yet at Stoke Mandeville they would be saved simply by being turned every two hours by six nurses. This would allow them to progress towards wheelchair mobility. It later gave birth to the Paralympics.

Fred asked to watch a prostate operation and realising what

technology could do to improve lives, he took a nursing qualification and became first a state registered nurse for three years at Barnet General and then a doctor for another six. Internships followed at St Helier and the Royal Free, both medical and surgical, and another in obstetrics.

At the Royal Free he met his future wife, Margaret Birtwhistle, an anaesthetist, in an operating theatre. Both wore masks as their eyes met. They were married in 1960 and would have four children. Their son Tom and daughter Lucy would both go on to become psychologists and their daughter Sally to work for Surrey County Council. Tragically their other daughter Nicola died as a teenager after a road accident. Margaret died in 2014.

Fred worked in Shere for a year while seeking a general practice partnership but eventually found a vacancy in 1968 at Ashlea, 60 Church Street where Waitrose now stands. The name came of course from its area, serving some 8000 patients in Ashted and 12,000 in Leatherhead.

He chose Leatherhead in particular because of its cottage hospital. In those days this was owned by GPs who had admitting rights for their own patients and could call in consultants if required. Seamless care from the cradle to the grave was the essence of a cottage hospital under the NHS.

GPs would carry out minor surgical operations at the time. Fred's predecessor at the practice was Dr Alan Everett who would carry out appendicitis and other operations. Fred also recalled Dr Alan Easton who was a GP surgeon in Bookham. Today's situation with patients often unable even to see a GP and perhaps relying on telephone calls was unthinkable then.

The original GP site under Dr Roger Gilbert had been in Woodfield Lane, opposite the Ashted Peace Memorial Hall. The Ashlea surgery, opposite the new Thorndike Theatre, was on the ground floor and Fred and his family lived upstairs for a year. He had complete control of his patients' care and could invite surgeons from St George's and elsewhere to operate at Leatherhead, although the hospital came under the auspices of Epsom General where most of the consultants were based. He became a GP representative on the Epsom executive committee, trained GPs there and mentored others in a



pioneer study at Surrey University. This while frequently making home visits as well as surgery appointments. He had a few private patients too. The system survived until the 1980s.

In 1970 Fred and colleagues created the League of Friends which raised funds for Leatherhead Hospital. It brought in £4 million through legacies, donations, barbecues in the grounds and other carnival events. There was an annual nurses' dance in the parish hall with a cabaret of doctors and nurses.

Fred and Margaret moved to 19 The Mount in Fetcham. He retired around the year 2000 and was a busy working GP when he first became a voluntary steward at Leatherhead Museum in the 1980s. He soon became chairman of the Friends of the Museum, then a museum trustee, and joined the L&DLHS Executive Committee in order to represent the Friends.

The Museum had several curators over the years - David Bruce, Fiona Goldsmith and then Lorraine Spindler - while Alan Pooley acted as both curator and manager. Gwen Hoad started the Museum shop in Fred's early days there. He was involved throughout and also led guided walks after Linda Heath and Derek Renn both gave these up. When David Hartley gave up the L&DLHS chairmanship in 2015 Fred stepped in to avoid any loss of momentum for the Society and chaired meetings until John Rowley took over in 2016.

During this time too Fred was involved with the programme committee, taking it over when that also became necessary. He was always keen to ensure that the L&DLHS was represented during Mole Valley's annual Heritage Week.

When illness first arose he maintained his usual stoical approach and refused to let it undermine his L&DLHS and other commitments, continuing to provide input by phone and email. He participated in a recent Executive Committee meeting via Zoom and volunteered a collection of medical instruments for the Society's stand at the Surrey Archaeological Society's Research Symposium in April. He also continued his concern for the hospital League of Friends and for Leatherhead Horticultural Society of which he had been president and had organised annual fund-raising garden parties every May.

So too his links with Leatherhead Methodist Church which was where his funeral took place on Tuesday, 24 May.

# 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 legends and did not pretend to historical accuracy. Here are summaries by FRANK HASLAM of the first two of the nine legends. The others will appear in future *Newsletters*.



### *DULCIANNA, 1750*

Dulcianna's grandfather, aged 72, a former merchant in Eastcheap, had almost lost his wealth in the South Sea Bubble of 1720 but recovered. He lived at The Leather House, Leatherhead. Dulcianna, aged 19, was the sole remaining member of his family. She was named after a new stop on the St Paul's Cathedral organ which her grandfather had played.

Snetzler, the famous organ builder, was finishing his work on the new organ in Leatherhead Parish Church. Grandfather wanted to be the first organist but Dulcianna's admirer, Horace Pagette, was appointed instead as organist by the Vestry. Her grandfather then collapsed and died of shock and like Shakespeare's Ophelia, poor Dulcianna was found drowned.

A year later Pagette was in church at the organ entertaining his new lady but she became bored and departed. A strangeness was felt in the air with ghostly arms drawing him back over the edge of the gallery. There was a cry of 'Dulcianna, mercy!' and he fell to the stone floor and was found dead the next morning.

*Notes on the organ at Leatherhead Parish Church: Originally the organ stood in the topmost of three galleries under the church tower. It was built by Snetzler, one of the followers of the school of Father Smith, a famous organ builder. The diapasons on the great*

*organ are all that is left of the original. The ancient keyboard - upon which Handel is said to have played - hangs in the vestry. It is now part of the glorious Thomas Parker organ of the Parish Church. The keys' colours are the reverse of what you might expect.*



### ***THE RUNNING HORSE, 1560***

Miss Elynor Rummyng (shown on Page 12) was hostess at the inn in this story. Queen Elizabeth I was about to visit Guildford.

It was a wet spring and the River Mole was very high. Squire Gardyner, Sergeant of Elizabeth's Cellar, had just built Thorncroft Manor and the cellar had flooded. Gardyner had hoped to lodge the Queen as she passed through Leatherhead but this was now impossible.

The Queen had promised to send for Cicely Davenant of Dorking and make her one of the court ladies. Cicely had plenty of admirers. They included Sir John Peverell, a jolly spark aged over 30, and his cousin Will as well as Sergeant Gardyner's eldest son who was ten years younger and a bit of a bumpkin. Sir John and Will came to blows over Cicely and Sir John swore to Will that he would wed her within the week.

Overnight a messenger delivered a note from the Queen requiring Cicely to join her at Guildford. The next day she set off in a coach

with her maid.

Will received a note inviting him to the wedding of Sir John and Cicely 'under the hedge' at Netley Heath at 10.30 that morning. In those days there were lots of priests without livings for various reasons who would conduct unofficial ceremonies for a fee. Half-dressed and grabbing an unsaddled horse, Will rode bare-backed to Netley Heath but when he was nearly there his horse fell.

Cicely's coach was ambushed by Sir John. It was he who had sent the false message from the Queen. During a struggle Will appeared, rescued her and set off back to Leatherhead. Almost there, Sir John caught up with them but in the ensuing struggle Will got Cicely across the swollen River Mole. They were rescued and taken to the inn where the Queen greeted them.

She had arrived late the previous night, having found the river impassable. She said: 'Rummyng House indeed. Henceforth it shall be called The Running Horse.'

*Notes: Not content with seeing Will and Cicely happily united, the Queen also knighted the young hero and the head of a charging horse became his crest. A crest on the old helmet over the Gardyner Brass in Leatherhead Church has been described as showing a running horse which might have something to do with the name of the inn. However, unfortunately for the tale, the helmet in the church actually depicts not a horse but a hornless goat.*



## RUNNING HORSE POEM

Thanks to BRIAN BOUCHARD who sent the following verse from The Project Gutenberg eBook of *The Old Inns of Old England, Volume I (of 2)*, by Charles G. Harper.

### ELYNOR RUMMYNG

*And this comely dame  
I vnderstande her name  
Is Elynor Rummynge,  
At home in her wonnynge:  
And as men say,  
She dwelt in Sothray,  
In a certain stede  
Bysyde Lederhede,  
She is a tonnysh gyb,  
The Deuyll and she be syb,  
But to make vp my tale,  
She breweth nappy ale,  
And maketh port-sale  
To travelers and tynkers,  
To sweters and swynkers,  
And all good ale-drynkers,  
That wyll nothyng spare,  
But drynke tyll  
they stare  
And brynge themselves bare,  
Wyth, now away the mare  
And let vs sley care  
As wyse as a hare.  
Come who so wyll  
To Elynor on the hyll  
Wyth Fyll the cup, fyll  
And syt there by styl.  
Erly and late  
Thyther cometh Kate  
Cysly, and Sare*

*Wyth theyr legges bare  
And also theyr fete.  
Some haue no mony  
For theyr ale to pay,  
That is a shrewd aray;  
Elynor swered, Nay,  
Ye shall not beare away  
My ale for nought,  
By hym that me bought!  
Wyth, Hey, dogge, hey,  
Haue these hogges away  
Wyth, Get me a staffe,  
The swyne eate my draffe!  
Stryke the hogges  
wyth a clubbe,  
They haue dranke up my  
swyllyn tubbe.  
Insteede of quoyne  
and mony,  
Some bryng her a coney,  
And some a pot wyth honey;  
Some a salt, some a spoone,  
Some theyr hose, some theyr  
shoone;  
Some run a good trot  
Wyth skyllet or pot:  
Some fyll a bag-full  
Of good Lemster wool;  
An huswyfe of trust  
When she is athyrst*

*Such a web can spyn  
 Her thryft is full thyn.  
 Some go strayght thyther  
 Be it slaty or slydder,  
 They hold the hyghway;  
 They care not what men say,  
 Be they as be may  
 Some loth to be espyd,  
 Start in at the backesyde,  
 Over hedge and pale,  
 And all for good ale.  
 Some brought walnuts,  
 Some apples, some pears,  
 And some theyr  
 clyppying shears.  
 Some brought this and that,  
 Some brought I  
 wot ne're what,  
 Some brought theyr  
 husband's hat.*

and so forth, for hundreds of lines more.

A very old pictorial sign, framed and glazed, and fixed against the wall of the gable, represents the ill-favoured landlady, and is inscribed: 'Elynor Rummyn dwelled here, 1520.'

## ELYNOR RUMMYNG FACES PUNISHMENT

**The medieval system of punishment by humiliation and its potential implications for the Leatherhead hostess.**

From the Anglo-Saxon period responsibility for law enforcement was placed upon 'tithings', groups of ten householders who lived close together and were made collectively responsible for each other's behaviour under a head tithing-man (*capitalis decennarius*).

Central to the operation of a Norman manor court was its monitoring of communal behaviour in the tithing, known as the 'view of frankpledge'. Prosecutions for breach of the assize of ale in particular involved charges that commonly amounted to a licence fee to sell alcohol rather than punishment for any actual offence.

At a Court of Pachenesham Magna, Pachenesham and Lethered with view of frankpledge, held there Monday before the nativity of St John Baptist on 22 June 1472, the jurors presented that there was *n o c u c k i n g - s t o o l* ('*cukkyngstol*') and that the

pillory ('*le pelerye*') and stocks ('*lez stokkys*') were extremely ruinous through the lord's neglect. Also that Lucy Powke, Joan Cokkes, Richard Godman and Thomas at Deen, brewers, broke the assize; therefore each in mercy, 2d each. The latter financial penalty ('*amercement*') of two pence for each brew undertaken by the several individuals was a common charge in the 15th century.

Punishments for brewing and vending bad ale could be fines or humiliating display in a cucking stool. The words '*similiter malam cervisiam faciens, aut in Cathedra ponebatur stercoris*' have been interpreted as 'for making bad beer a brewster was put in the muck-cart'. If declared undrinkable (presumably below merchantable quality), the ale could nevertheless be donated for use by the poor and needy! Sometimes a producer might be compelled to drink his own sub-standard brew.

The verb *cukken* from Old Norse meant 'to void excrement'. A 'cucking' - dung - stool with a hole cut into the seat was designed to be used as a commode. For punishment they could be set up where passers-by would jeer and throw things at offenders placed on them, as with the similar practice of placing malefactors in the pillory or stocks. Later, a chair might be fastened to a long wooden beam fixed as a seesaw on the edge of a pond or river as a 'ducking stool'. Others were not static but mounted on a pair of wooden wheels with two long shafts fixed to the axles so that they could be wheeled through the streets. This was called a 'tumbrel'.

Robert a Dene, possibly a descendant of Thomas at Deen, brewer, was the parish ale-taster on 18 August 1525 who, as reported by the late John H Harvey, fined Alianora Romyng (Elynor Rummyng), 'a common tippelor' (*communis tiplar cervici*) or purveyor of ale, 2d at the court of Pachenesham Magna for selling her product at excessive price and by small measures.

John Romyng was also declared to have been a common brewer of ale who kept a hostelry and in the same sold 'divers victuals at eccessive price'. Throughout the medieval period, hostelries did not require an operating licence and Elynor may actually just have been selling from her own home as a small business.

She did not suffer confinement in a cucking stool but became a subject of ridicule as Charles G. Harper observed in his book. He

wrote: '[A] very objectionable landlady, Elynor Rummyng, whose peculiarities are the subject of a laureate's verse, and John Skelton, the poet-laureate who hymned her person, her beer, and her customers, both flourished in the beginning of the 16th century.

'Skelton, whose genius was wholly satiric, no doubt, in his *Tunning* (brewing) of *Elynor Rummyng*, emphasised all her bad points, for it is hardly credible that even the rustics of the Middle Ages would have rushed so enthusiastically for her ale if it had been brewed in the way he describes.

'His long, rambling jingles, done in grievous spelling, picture her as a very ugly and filthy old person, with a face sufficiently grotesque to unnerve a strong man.

'The unlovely Elynor scraped up all manner of filth into her mash-tub, mixed it together with her "mangy fists", and sold the result as ale. It is proverbial that "there is no accounting for tastes", and it would appear as though the district had a peculiar liking for this kind of brew. They would have it somehow, even if they had to bring their food and furniture for it.'

No evidence has, however, been discovered to demonstrate that Miss Rummyng really was a proprietor of The Running Horse or was indeed an inn-keeper at all. Rather it appears that she was simply an 'alewife' or local brewess.

Walter Romyng held a tenement in Leatherhead during the 15th century and Nicholas Romyng appears as a brewer of ale in Courts of 1524-6.



# LECTURE REPORT

## THE LIFE OF DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE (1882-1976)

**RICHARD HUGHES** gave the Zoom lecture in February about Dame Sybil Thorndike, one of Britain's greatest actresses, who gave her name to Leatherhead's newly built theatre in 1969. It would remain until 2002 when the theatre reopened to the local community as simply Leatherhead Theatre.

Long ago in 1974, when I moved to Leatherhead to start teaching at St John's school, one of the main attractions was the existence of a five-year-old theatre. I feel a little sad that although the theatre still exists, it is not quite the same.

The removal of the name Thorndike I found quite upsetting. Sybil Thorndike was very proud of her links with this town and the theatre that she gave her name to.



*Above: Sybil Thorndike in her most famous role as George Bernard Shaw's St Joan.*

She was born in Lincolnshire in 1882, the eldest of four children. Her father Arthur was a clergyman in Gainsborough but the family soon moved to Kent and Arthur became a minor canon of Rochester Cathedral.

The Church of England played a huge part in Sybil's life. She was profoundly religious and her faith never wavered.

She was initially meant to have a musical career but her arthritic fingers ruled out a

career as a pianist. Instead she went to what would later become RADA, then just the Academy of Dramatic Arts. At 22 she got a first big break when a famous theatrical touring manager, Ben Greet, invited her to join his company. She went to North America for nearly two years before returning to join the Gaiety Theatre Company in Manchester where she met actor Lewis Casson. Their marriage would last over 60 years and they had four children.

Through him she met famous writers including George Bernard Shaw. In 1911 Lewis became director of the Gaiety Theatre and immediately they had a hit play with Sybil starring and Lewis directing. The play, *Him Who Waits*, was a triumph which eventually worked its way to London's West End after Lewis fell out with their Manchester paymasters. Sybil's laughter alone eased the uncomfortable atmosphere at his formal leaving dinner.

In 1914, Ben Greet asked Sybil to rejoin his company. He was putting on a Shakespeare season at the Royal Victoria Hall near Waterloo Station. This was soon transformed into a centre of theatrical excellence by one Lilian Baylis and became The Old Vic. They put on 16 plays during the First World War,

In 1917 Sybil's brother was killed in action and she was devastated. But although she and Lewis were both pacifists, he had a crisis of conscience so volunteered for service and won the Military Cross. After the war, Sybil and Lewis respectively starred in and produced several classical Greek dramas at The Old Vic, a specialism that survived for the rest of their careers. They also toured the provinces and Europe with the British Council.

In 1924, Sybil got the biggest break of her career when George Bernard Shaw embarked on a new play and before its completion, invited her to take the leading role. The play was *St Joan*. Joan of Arc was canonised that year. Shaw was notorious at rehearsals, roaming the auditorium and interrupting proceedings, but the production was a fantastic success. The play won Shaw the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925 and a decade later he also won an Oscar for the screen adaptation of *Pygmalion*, the only person ever to receive both awards.

*St Joan* made Sybil Thorndike a megastar although her natural kindness stopped her ever becoming a prima donna. In 1938 she



*Above: Two Dames, Sybil Thorndike (right) stars with Edith Evans in The Waters of the Moon.*

returned to the West End in Emlyn Williams' *The Corn is Green*. She acted the main part until 1940 when the theatre had to close down. The play has been revived many times and was made into a Hollywood film.

Sybil and Lewis worked hard to prevent World War 2 and even signed a petition to Neville Chamberlain to reopen talks with Hitler

after Germany had invaded Poland. Notwithstanding that, Sybil was later included on a Nazi blacklist for execution had the Germans invaded Britain.

Their son John had a house in Ottways Lane, Ashtead, where Sybil and Lewis moved in to look after their daughter-in-law and grandchildren when he went on active service with the Fleet Air Arm. He was shot down and they assumed he was dead but were overjoyed to hear that he had actually been captured when this was announced on the radio by Lord Hawhaw, the Nazi propagandist. John was eventually freed in 1945 after helping to organise - but not join - the doomed great escape of film fame.

After the war, Sybil joined a British Council tour of devastated Europe including Belsen concentration camp. Lewis was knighted in 1945 by the new Labour government.

Sybil appeared in films including *Nicholas Nickleby* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*. She returned to the West End in 1951 in another huge hit, *The Waters of the Moon* alongside fellow Dames, Edith Evans and Wendy Hiller. Edith Evans was notoriously hard to work with. Sybil was also in *A Day by the Sea*, directed by John Gielgud whose success was overshadowed by his prosecution at the time for gross indecency. Sybil supported him in his plight when being actively homosexual earned imprisonment.

In 1953, the 50th anniversary of her stage career, Sybil and Lewis marked the occasion with a British Council world tour which got them into trouble for refusing to perform before a segregated audience in apartheid South Africa. The same period brought the Kitchen Sink era of 'angry young men', started by John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*. Sybil loved it and championed the new playwrights of the day.

In 1957 she starred with Laurence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe in Terence Rattigan's *The Prince and the Showgirl*. This contrasted with appearance on TV's *This is Your Life* with Eamonn Andrews and a role in *Jet Storm* alongside a host of 1950s TV stars including the rock and roll singer Marty Wilde whom she loved describing as 'my rock and roller'. She later co-starred with another pop star, Adam Faith, in *Night Must Fall*.

Sybil and Lewis were heavily supportive of Laurence Olivier in



campaigning for a national theatre. In 1960 she cooperated with Noel Coward in his play about a group of old actresses living in a care home for geriatric theatricals. It had mixed success. She also worked with Olivier at the Festival Theatre, Chichester, in his production of Chekov's *Uncle Vanya* at what was the embryonic National Theatre.

In 1969 she was overjoyed to give her name to the newly built theatre on the site of Leatherhead's former Crescent Cinema. She had had frequent meetings with organiser Hazel Vincent Wallace and architect Roderick Ham and work had got under way in 1966.

Lewis and Sybil came down from London to launch the construction work. A bottle of champagne on a piece of rope had to be swung against the wall of the edifice and its demolition would mark the beginning of the project. Sybil failed to break the bottle but Lewis,



aged 91, succeeded. 'That's why I married him,' she shouted.

In September 1969, the theatre opened. Sadly, Lewis had died in May just four months earlier. Sybil attended the opening production of *The Lion in Winter*, attended by Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon. As they wandered in, a respectful hush descended on the audience. 'Good heavens,' shouted Sybil. 'This feels more like a church than a theatre.' Everybody cheered up.

A month later in October, Sybil Thorndike made her last stage performance there in *There Was an Old Woman*. It played to a packed house night after night and still got standing ovations. She died 9 June 1976 and was cremated in Golders Green but a memorial service followed at Westminster Abbey where a tribute poem by J B Priestley was read out.

## FEATURE



*Edward Lear*

### **EDWARD LEAR IN ASHTEAD AND LEATHERHEAD by BRIAN BOUCHARD**

Victorian artist, illustrator, writer, poet and musician Edward Lear (1812–1888) was a regular visitor to this part of Surrey for much of his life. He loved walking in the local countryside which inspired some of his poetry including the famous nonsense verse.

He first became acquainted with the Hon Mary Greville Howard of Ashtead Park before 1834. Later in 1847 his sister, Eleanor, wife of Bank of England Governor William Newsom, moved with her husband into No 1 The Lilacs, also known as 25 Church Road, Leatherhead. She remained after his death in 1859 until her own in March 1885 at the ripe old age of 85.

The Lears' missionary brother Charles also lived at that house for some three years with his African wife Adjouah. He was taken seriously ill in West Africa and ordered home on the first available ship. Adjouah volunteered to accompany him as his nurse, an offer he accepted provided they first married to protect her honour. She attended a local school in Leatherhead to learn English. They eventually returned to Africa.

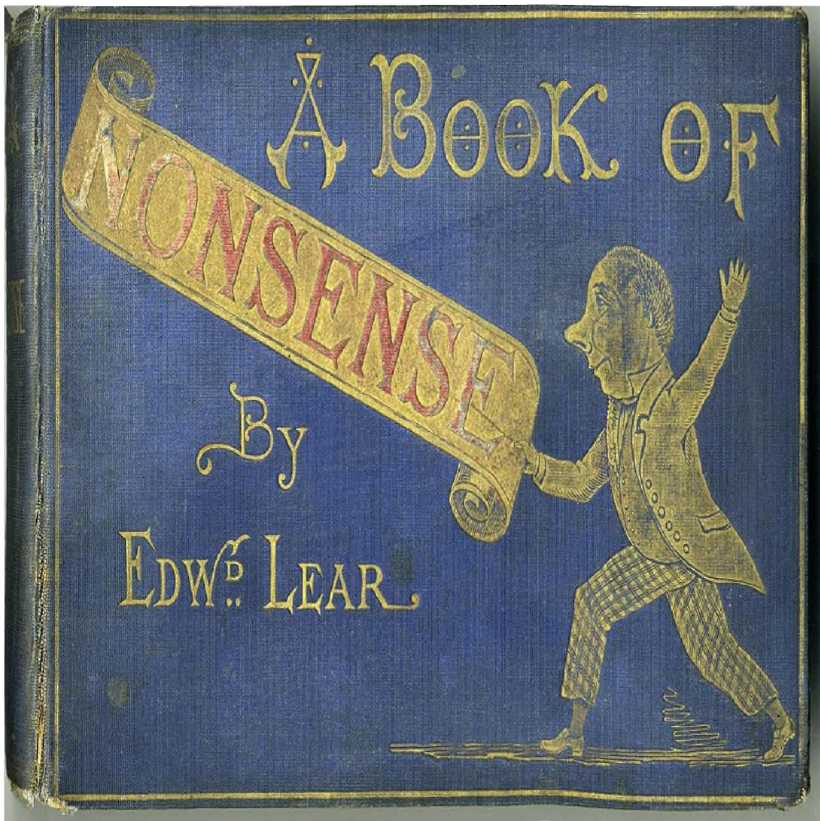
On 19 August 1869, Edward Lear was a guest of Mrs Greville-Howard at Ashtead Park when he wrote to Frances, Countess Waldegrave: 'I came here for two nights and return to misery tomorrow. Ever since 1834 I have always been used to come to Mrs Greville Howard's, who all that time has been a very unvarying good friend. She is now more than 84 but is as bright and amiable as ever.....she is one of the finest specimens of the Grand English Lady of the olden time I have known. [She left him £100 in her 1874 Will.]

'Meanwhile the park is much as it used to be 30 years ago, so that

I shall go and walk among the deer as I did then; and so my one day of idleness will go by without much growling on my part.'

Recollections of Ashtead Park's deer may have inspired his poem:

*And those who watch at that midnight hour  
From Hall or Terrace, or lofty Tower,  
Cry, as the wild light passes along, —  
    'The Dong! — the Dong!  
The wandering Dong through the forest goes!  
    The Dong! the Dong!  
The Dong with a luminous Nose!*





## FEATURE

### WHO WERE THE MULHOLLANDS?

**CATHY LEWER asks what's the connection between Leatherhead, Wimbledon Theatre, the Hallé Orchestra, a WW2 radio show, and Albert Einstein? The answer is the family of a woman called Aimée Joan Mulholland (1902-1994), a successful musician who lived in Leatherhead and employed Cathy's grandmother, Doris Lewer, as a char lady.**

Going through Doris's memorabilia, Cathy found a poem, *The Yarn of the Graf Spee*, given to her at Christmas in 1939 by her employer, Joan Mulholland, as she was known. It sparked research into the musician and her family which produced some fascinating discoveries, including a distant but curious link with the exiled scientist Albert Einstein.

Born in 1902, Joan was the daughter of theatre owner and developer John Brennan Mulholland (1852-1925) and his second wife, Aimée Louise, who lived with their four children at 73 Upper Richmond Road, Putney. Joan's three siblings were Vera Kathleen (1900-1999), John Victor (1901-1984) and Nora (1906-1969).

As a music student in the late 1920s, Joan became friendly with John Barbirolli (1899-1970), the conductor and cellist best known for his work with the Hallé Orchestra. From an Anglo-Italian musical family, Barbirolli began playing the violin at the age of four. By the 1930s he was conducting with the New York Philharmonic. In 1943, the Hallé Orchestra appealed to him to conduct them and he remained for many years. He was knighted in 1949.

Joan moved into St John's Villa, St John's Road, Leatherhead in the 1930s. She met schoolmaster Geoffrey Legge Gettins (1909-1971) who worked at St John's School opposite her house and they married in 1943 but never had any children. Geoffrey was a Liverpoolian whose own father ran a teacher-training school.

In 1932, Joan's sister Nora married Clement Charles Covernton, sadly a short-lived marriage as her husband died in 1937 and she moved to Bristol in 1939. She was working as a secretary and living in Byron Place with Horace Percival, a supporting actor in Tommy

20. 12. 39.

I will spin you the yarn of the giant "Graf Spee":  
 An arm'd raider, nay, rather a pirate ship, she  
 Had she sailed, thought the Reich, on the crest of the wave -  
 Till she got her deserts in a watery grave.  
 Now her tower of control was unusually high,  
 Thus her victims from very long range she could spy,  
 And she boasts that ~~was~~ few ships to fight her would dare  
 For she said if they did she would blow them - elsewhere.  
 In the Southern Atlantic, on commerce she preyed  
 And to sink every vessel on sight she essayed,  
 Whether battle-ship, merchantman, trawler or yacht,  
 Whether allied or Neutral she cared not a jot.  
 She was queen of the Southern Atlantic - she thought  
 And her actions piratic had full Reich support.  
 But December the thirteenth, the fatal day, dawned  
 And the "Spee" was forewarn'd altho' hardly forewarn'd!  
 When a British Light-Cruiser she spied in the distance  
 She did not expect any active resistance.  
 The "Exeter's" captain quite otherwise thought  
 And he went into action and gallantly fought.  
 He returned shell for shell tho' his guns had less pow'r  
 And those missiles of death he continued to shower  
 On the "Spee", until, crippled himself, he retired  
 While the brave little "Ajax" and "Achilles" fired  
 And so harassed the "Spee" throughout most of the day  
 That she simply turned tail and slunk swiftly away  
 And in Monte Video she sanctuary sought  
 To repair all the damage the cruisers had wrought.  
 Uruguay gave her shelter for seventy hours  
 While the cruisers kept watch - as did all the Great Powers.  
 Would she creep 'long the coast 'neath the cover of night?  
 Or appear in the open and put up a fight?  
 Her attackers were small - tho' their courage was great,  
 Would she show the white feather, or go to her fate?  
 These most pertinent questions gave all the world pause, -  
 While the Fuehrer denounced the neutrality laws!  
 Soon the witching hour struck when the "Graf Spee" must leave  
 The protection of Uruguay's waters, erecieve  
 Now she sets her course West then she veers to South-West  
 And she halts in the mouth of the river, Confessed  
 Is her overthrow, for, in a mad fit of rage  
 The command for to scuttle the ship Hitler gave.  
 But a protest unspoken her captain then made,  
 For he shot himself once all his men were conveyed  
 Into safety, and now the whole crew is interned  
 And the "Pride of the Reich" to a cinder is burned.  
 In the eyes of the world, her name prestige is nil  
 Whereas Britain's revealed both her courage and skill.  
 And so thus ends the "Yarn of the Admiral Spee"  
 In a brilliant success for the British Navy!

*Yours sincerely, A. Joan Mulholland.*

**Above: The poem Joan Mulholland gave to Doris Lewer at Christmas 1939. It was about the sinking of the predatory German ship the Graf Spee.**

Handley's popular war-time radio comedy *It's That Man Again (ITMA)*. First broadcast in 1939, the show also featured, at various times, Hattie Jacques and Derek Guyler. Horace Percival later starred as Mr Wimple in the 1950s radio shows *Life with the Lyons* and *The Lyons in Paris*.

In 1945 when her mother Aimée Louise died at the age of 64, Nora Mulholland was living with her in Mynster Cottage, Dorking, while Horace Percival was registered nearby at The White Horse Hotel. However she went on to marry Brian O'Shaunessy, a friend of her brother John Victor, in 1948. John Victor himself had married Kathleen Covernton, Nora's sister-in-law, in 1933 but she died in 1948 and he set up home with Barbara (née Goodall) in Chaldon, Surrey. They later married in 1955.

In 1939, Aimée Louise Mulholland had been living in a house called The Wigwam in Colemans Stairs Road, Birchington, near Margate with her eldest daughter, Vera. She was listed on the 1939 register as 'theatre owner'. Not much is known about the life of Vera but by the 1960s she was living in Wimbledon and appears to have remained there for the rest of her life.

At some point, Joan and Geoffrey left Leatherhead and settled in Tiverton, Devon. Nora eventually moved there to be nearer her sister.

So what about the father of this family, John B Mulholland, who died in 1925 and never lived to see the marriages of any of these children?

He had had an extremely successful career in theatre management and had later owned and run several popular venues. In the early 1890s he was lessee and general manager of the Grand Theatre, Nottingham, and while there began planning construction of London's Theatre Metropole, with the idea of bringing West End successes to Camberwell.

It opened 29 October 1894 with a production by the Comyns Carr's Company of *Sowing the Wind*. The theatre, designed by Bertie Crewe and W G R Sprague, had a rear door which permitted a horse and carriage to be driven straight on to the stage. It went on to be renamed the Camberwell Empire in 1906, and by 1912 early Bioscope silent films were being shown there. By 1918, these had become so popular that the theatre was transformed into Camberwell Theatre and Picture House, run by Associated Cinematograph

Theatres and playing a mixture of screen and live productions.

Another Mulholland project was financing of the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, again designed by W G R Sprague. Its doors opened on Boxing Day 1902 with afternoon and evening performances of *Cinderella*. Flattering press comments on the building's amenities and architectural features were carried far and wide, even reaching a Parisian magazine. Ivor Novello and Noël Coward would later appear there frequently.

By the 1950s, Mulholland's son John Victor had taken over as licensee and the theatre was used by the BBC for live and recorded television and radio productions including ten of *The Goon Show*. The theatre finally closed in 1963 and was demolished.

John B Mulholland's last creation was Wimbledon Theatre which opened Boxing Day 1910 and was described by *The Stage* as 'one of the finest theatres in existence'.

Plans had been 'drawn by Messrs Cecil Masey and Roy Young to Mr Mulholland's own designs and under his immediate personal superintendence.' The theatre was unique in having Victorian-style Turkish baths in the basement. The opening show, a specially written pantomime of *Jack and Jill*, ran for six weeks. Wimbledon Theatre was very popular between the wars, with performers including Sybil Thorndike, Gracie Fields, and again both Ivor Novello and Noël Coward.

John B Mulholland died in 1925, leaving a fortune of more than



***Above: Part of a Theatre Metropole poster with John B Mulholland shown in the bottom corner.***

***(Credit:***

***[www.arthurlloyd.co.uk](http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk)***

£148,000, worth £9 million today. His funeral at Putney Vale Cemetery was attended by many in the theatre world.

John Victor continued in theatre management. When he set up home with Barbara in Chaldon, Surrey, she was already married to Commander Oliver Stillingfleet Locker-Lampson, a hero of World War 1 and the subject of a book *The Czar's British Squadron* by Bryan Perret and Anthony Lord. A Conservative MP, Locker-Lampson's ancestral home was Rowfant, near Crawley, in Sussex. His half sister Eleanor married Lionel Tennyson, second son of the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

As a younger son Locker-Lampson inherited property near Cromer in Norfolk. In September 1933 he offered shelter to the great scientist Albert Einstein, who was then a refugee from Nazi Germany. The two men are thought to have met at a lecture in Oxford and began exchanging letters, hence the offer of sanctuary. A scheme was thought up with King Albert of Belgium, possibly including Winston Churchill, and Einstein was brought across the English Channel to Roughton Heath in Norfolk, where Locker-Lampson had hired a strip of land and built three huts. The great scientist was free to work there and further developed the theories that are the cornerstone of much of today's science.

With a heavy price on his head the threat of Nazi bounty hunters was very real, so Einstein was guarded night and day. Two armed secretaries helped, one of whom was Barbara Goodall. In 1935 she married Locker-Lampson and they had two sons. At their wedding he was 55 and she was 26. Years later, she had been living with John Victor Mulholland for quite a while when Locker-Lampson died in 1954 and she married John Victor the following year.

Einstein moved on to the United States after a short time and settled there for the rest of his life but not before he was photographed reading to Locker-Lampson and Barbara outside one of the huts at Roughton Heath. The photo is on the cover of this *Newsletter*.

Barbara died in 1977 aged 68 and John Victor in 1984 at the age of 82 at Rowfant Lodge. Like his three sisters, he had never had children so the Mulholland family story ended with the death of Vera in 1999, just short of 100 years old.

## FEATURE

### SIR JOHN HENRY LUSCOMBE

**STUART HIBBERD** has been annotating the diary of Clara Luscombe (1823-1910) whose eldest son, later Sir John Henry Luscombe (1848-1937), was a former Leatherhead schoolboy who went on to play rugby for England in the first ever international game in 1871.

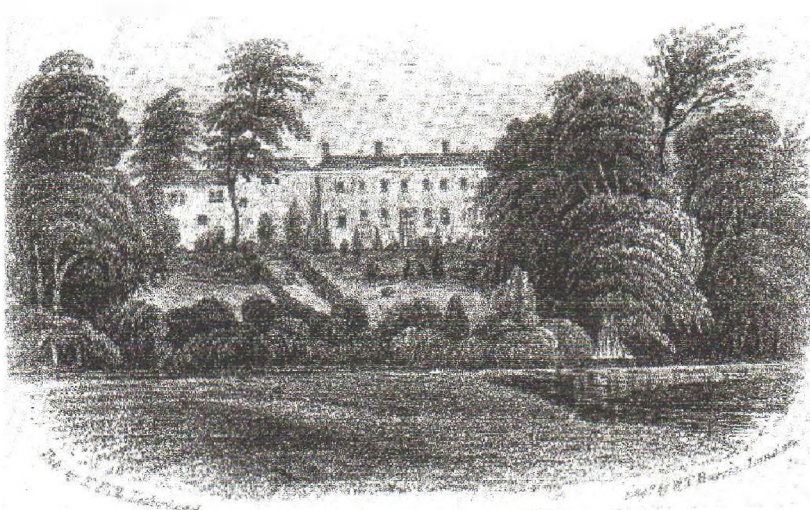
John Henry Luscombe was born 25 May 1848 in Forest Hill, Kent, where his father, also John Henry (1797-1883), was a shipowner who married Clara Bristow when he was 50 and she was 24. The younger John, known as Harry, had two younger brothers, Francis (1849-1926) and Alfred (1851-1942), and a sister, Clara Elizabeth (1854-1900).

John was initially educated locally in Upper Norwood but in his early teens he attended the Mansion Grammar School, Leatherhead. The first reference in Clara's diary is in June 1862 when she says he has returned to the school:

‘JUNE 2nd. Again have I to note the time passed in the enjoyment of mercies to me and mine, countless as the sands of the sea. My dear boys at school. My dear son Harry very happy at Leatherhead. John and myself went to see him on his 14th birthday and a very pleasant day we passed visiting once again lovely Box Hill.

‘JUNE 7th. I this morning received a letter from Mr Ibbs, head teacher at Mr Payne's, giving a most excellent character to my dear boy. May God's grace be given abundantly that he may persevere and maintain this bright account given of him for no character could be better.

‘Oh! What a comfort to my husband and myself. My God I thank Thee for all Thy blessings. I did not know of his good conduct when I wrote yesterday to ask for him to come home for the Sunday. He arrived by two o'clock looking so well and happy. We have been for a walk since dinner to walk home with my sister Bessie who drank tea with Mrs Harrold. On Wednesday last I went with Nancie and Miss Heath to see dear Frank and we had a lovely walk through Greenwich Park and Frank was looking much better; he is taking



*The Mansion House Grammar School  
From the River Mole c: 1850s  
(Engraving by W. T. Harris of London)  
Published by Thomas Hill Chemist & Stationer Bridge Street  
Leatherhead*

Bass's Ale to strengthen him.' Frank was her brother-in-law.

In April 1864 she says this will be John's last term at the school and by the age of 16 he had embarked on a maritime career, joining *The Norwood*, a ship under the command of his uncle Frank.

Both John and his brother Francis were keen rugby players. Francis went to Tonbridge School and in 1868 with two fellow Old Tonbridgians, founded Gypsies Football Club. Although John had gone to Leatherhead rather than Tonbridge he joined the same club and proved so good a player that he was selected to play in the first international match, Scotland vs England in 1871. Francis too would become a rugby international afterwards.

However, John's career was severely limited by his time spent at sea and as the eldest son in a shipping family he was expected to pursue a career in that field, subsequently becoming a highly successful insurance broker, chairman of Lloyd's Register and was knighted for his services to marine underwriting.

## FEATURE

### **THE RUXTONS - FROM LEWIS CARROLL TO THE RAF**

**BRIAN BOUCHARD** followed up a recent enquiry about a young RAF officer killed in World War 2 and commemorated on the Ashted War Memorial. It led to some surprising discoveries about the young man's family background.

At 06.00 hours on 29 September 1941, Blenheim Z6645 took off to carry out a routine patrol in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was part of 203 Squadron, RAF Volunteer Reserve. On board were Pilot Officer Thomas Ross Ruxton, 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. 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 Ruxton, son of widow Mrs Annie Ruxton of Ashted, was 26. He had probably learned to fly while at Cambridge and had enlisted in the RAF straight from university. In 1937 he was called up for service as a reservist sergeant pilot and received his officer's commission for the duration of hostilities on 17 August 1940.

He may have gone to school in Oxford where his mother, Annie Gray Wright Henderson, born September 1871, had married Arthur Frederick Ruxton on 30 June back in 1900. Arthur Frederick had been born 12 June 1870 in Calcutta, India, to George Rawdon Ruxton, a Calcutta merchant, and Caroline Anne Huth who came from a wealthy family of merchant bankers.

Thomas, the later RAF pilot, may have been named after Lieutenant-General Thomas Ross, an uncle by marriage, so the family had a military link. However there was also an ecclesiastical and academic background. His mother Annie was the daughter of Patrick Arkley Wright Henderson (1841-1922), ordained deacon in 1869 and priest in 1870. He had been a Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford, in 1867, chaplain and tutor in 1868, proctor from 1876-77, sub-warden and later bursar in 1881, becoming warden (head of college) from 1903-13.





Among the most famous of Oxford alumni during Annie's childhood was Charles L. Dodgson, Christ Church alumnus and better known as Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Dodgson was also an early pioneering photographer. In the days of very high infant and child mortality, friends would sometimes ask him to photograph their offspring in case the worst happened and nude studies were typically requested. Annie and her sister Hamilton Frances were among his subjects.

Dodgson's diary entry for 18 July 1879 recorded: 'Mrs Henderson brought Annie and Frances. I had warned Mrs Henderson that I thought the children so nervous I would not even ask for bare feet and was agreeably surprised to find they were ready for any amount of undress, and seemed delighted at being allowed to run about naked. It is a great privilege to have a model as Annie to take; a very pretty face, and a good figure...'

An image of the two sisters showing them as 'two shipwrecked maidens' (Page 33) is held by the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia, USA. Another, taken in Dodgson's Christ Church studio, depicts Annie resting on the grassy bank of a small stream, reading a book underneath a tree. This was purchased recently for Christ Church Library. Annie was aged eight at the time.

By 1905, Mrs Annie Ruxton was living at Ligny, Oakfield Road, Ashted. Her husband Arthur Frederick's business address was given as 9 Kensington Palace Gardens, where his father, George Rawdon Ruxton, an underwriting Member of Lloyds, had died on 3 May 1900.

During 1906 his address was given as 12 Tokenhouseyard, London, EC, that of Frederick Huth & Co, merchants of which his grandfather, Charles Frederick Huth, had been a director. The precise nature of this business is unclear but Arthur evidently became a man of some substance. In 1907 he also acquired the freehold of Wallop House, Nether Wallop in Hampshire. In the 1911 census his occupation was given as a 'merchant's clerk' but his actual role was not defined. He was probably employed by Frederick Huth & Co but whether or not in active management remains unknown.

By 1909 the Ruxton family had moved their residence in Ashted to Ardee (now Winterfold, number 53) at the highest point of Oakfield Road. This substantial mansion had a drawing room large enough to accommodate about 70 people who gathered there on 23 March 1911 for Ashted's first campaign meeting on behalf of women's suffrage. Annie was now an activist.

On 31 January 1912 she was involved in a Surrey Women's Suffrage demonstration at Richmond against a referendum on women's suffrage of the existing all-male electorate. The *Surrey Advertiser* reported a 'striking spectacle with numerous banners,

women in academic robes, and addresses by suffrage leaders'. The stage was decorated with banners from all the branches throughout the county and the procession was welcomed by the Mayor of Richmond.

During World War 1, Ardee seems to have been rented out while the Ruxtons went to their other home in Hampshire. In 1915 Annie gave birth to Thomas, the later RAF pilot. He may well have been influenced by his father's experience as inexplicably in 1918, during his 48th year, Arthur enlisted in the newly established Royal Air Force with a service number 311748.

However, when Thomas was only seven, Arthur died on 25 January 1922, aged just 51, and was then described as 'late of Malta Cottage near Yarmouth, Isle of Wight.' He may have gone there for his health. Malta Cottage at Halletts Shute, Norton, Freshwater, was a small formerly thatched cottage which had been modernised and expanded in 1912 by the then owner, Ada Reeve, an actress, singer and comedienne. She had sold the property in July 1920.

Arthur was interred at the churchyard of St Andrew's at Nether Wallop. So was his brother-in-law, Lieutenant-General Ross who has a stained glass window dedicated to him.

By the early 1930s Annie had returned to live in Ashtead. In 1940 she was back in Ardee and remained there for the rest of her life. She would have heard of Thomas's tragic loss while living there. But her days as a former Suffragette showed she was no shrinking violet.

The *Surrey Advertiser* on 27 February 1943 reported her publicly berating the National Fire Service for removing full time firemen from the Ashtead Station and from 1945 to 1947 she served on Leatherhead Urban District Council alongside the local silk worm farmer Sir Oliver Hart-Dyke. She died 12 August 1951 at Ardee.

Hamilton Frances, her sister and fellow childhood poser for Charles Dodgson, had married Jens Christopher Delphin Petersen in Calcutta on 14 November back in 1894. Her death on 23 March 1955, aged 82, was registered in Malvern.

## LECTURE REPORT

### THE STORY OF WIMBLEDON COMMON

The year's first monthly lecture was given in January by ANNE MILTON-WORSELL who told the story of Wimbledon Common and how it came to be the famous green space known today.

In 1968 Elisabeth Beresford took her young children for a Boxing Day walk on Wimbledon Common. Her young daughter Kate mispronounced the name and the Wombles were born. The first story-book was a huge success and the BBC TV series (1973-75) was narrated by Bernard Cribbins. There was even a pop band and best-selling album. The Wombles appeared at Glastonbury Festival in 2011 and came out of hibernation at the beginning of 2020 to spread the positive message of local environmentalism.

But without energetic actions in the 19th century, there would have been no common for the Wombles to live on. The famous rambling spot occupies 1140 acres encompassing both Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath to the north.

The area is what remains of the historic manor wasteland whose soil was too poor for agriculture. Tenants used it to graze their animals and cut firewood. It was not for the general public, only copyhold tenants. Freeholders were technically excluded.

The poor soil could support only a limited number of grazing animals. During the Tudor and Stuart centuries, every tenant had eight or 15 acres of land where they were allowed to graze oxen. Later it was horses, branded cows and up to 25 sheep which had to be guarded by a shepherd on penalty of a fine of 20 shillings. Also two pigs which had to have rings in their noses to stop them rooting up trees. If the animals strayed, they were placed in the pound. There were rules relating to what trees and branches could be used for firewood.

In many parts of the country, commons had already been enclosed by landowners by the 19th century so that land could be enriched for agriculture. In Wimbledon however it was the coming of the railway that brought new pressure on land for housing. Its population

in 1851 was 2693 but by 1871 it had quadrupled to 9087.

Before the enclosures, commons were heavily exploited and commoners fined for over use of the land. Even the clergy were guilty of this but records suggest that in years of plenty, there were fewer fines. Prosecutions for using the common seem to have ended by the 17<sup>th</sup> century although the short reign of James II saw Wimbledon villagers prosecuted for taking too much wood.

In 1796 there were complaints about outsiders digging gravel, cutting felling trees, and grazing cattle. Just before Waterloo, broken tiles and rubbish were found heaped upon the common. In 1822 a heap of dung was left by a carpenter, William Croft, close to his premises in West Place. He ignored an order to remove it.

The common was being used chaotically. Apart from allowing a number of people, ranging from the Lord of the Manor himself to William Jennings, a bricklayer, to enclose pieces of the common, the manor court seems to have given up trying to control the situation. In the 1830s there were more complaints of encroachment. A woman complained that it was no easy matter to cross the common by day or by night as it now harboured gypsies, vagrants and trespassers. Wealthy local residents objected.

Another use of the common up to that point now died out. This was the practice of duelling. One of the most famous encounters was that between Prime Minister William Pitt and MP George Tierney on Sunday, 27 May 1798. It followed a conflict in Parliament over Pitt's Bill for more effectual running of the Royal Navy. He wanted it passed through all of its stages in one day. Tierney objected and was accused of wanting to obstruct national defence.

Un-parliamentary language followed, ending in Pitt being challenged to a duel. It happened on Wimbledon Common, neither was hurt and honour was recognised. Other duels had less happy outcomes, many being fatal.

Wimbledon Common also became the site of the annual National Rifle Association meeting. One summer day in 1860 Queen Victoria fired the first shot before an enthusiastic crowd, watching from 400 metres away. She used a silken cord to pull the trigger of a pre-aimed rifle and the iron bullet hit the target. Participants were not regular soldiers but amateur members of a new volunteer corps. This



coincided with French invasion scares.

Men spent the fortnight shooting and socialising in a replica military camp, sleeping on bed rolls and cooking meals over a fire. The annual event continued until the 1890s when it was moved to Bisley, Surrey.

In 1864, Earl Spencer, Lord of the Manor, proposed to turn 700 acres of the common into a public park while selling off the rest for building development. He viewed the common as part of his private estate and had a bill drafted for submission to Parliament. On 11 November 1864, he called a meeting of local residents on his proposals which also included building a new manor house where the windmill had stood since 1817.

Although most present backed the plan, committees were formed in Wimbledon and Putney to oppose it. His Bill was eventually withdrawn but legal proceedings followed which lasted years until in 1870 Earl Spencer agreed terms involving ongoing financial compensation for him in return for permanent protection of the common under an Act passed on 22 May 1871. It would henceforth be managed by a body of conservators who would keep the commons open and un-enclosed, protecting the turf, trees and other natural flora, and preventing the wanton destruction of birds.

As a result of this, other metropolitan commons began to be preserved while part of Wimbledon Common would eventually become today's Site of Special Scientific Interest with its heathland, wetlands and wildlife habitats as well as golf courses and places for public leisure.

## **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 Dance Suite

**Grieg** Norwegian Dances, Op.35

and works by Percy Pitt, Constant Lambert  
and Percy Grainger



Duo Biz'art

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Details of membership from Dorking Concertgoers on 01306 740619

[www.dorkingconcertgoers.org.uk](http://www.dorkingconcertgoers.org.uk) [www.dorkinghalls.co.uk](http://www.dorkinghalls.co.uk)

