



*Leatherhead & District
Local History Society*



Newsletter

*January
2023*



Leatherhead Museum's new Curator, Cathy Brett, is spearheading an excitingly different era for the Local History Society. The Society owns and runs the Museum at our 17th century Hampton Cottage but we are about to raise its profile as a shared resource with the community. Look out for change in Church Street.

Covering Ashted, the Bookhams, Fetcham, Leatherhead

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EDITORIAL

This is a special edition of the L&DLHS *Newsletter* following the break in normal scheduling at the end of last year. A January issue marks both a new year and a new era for the Society following the appointment at last of a Curator at the Leatherhead Museum after several years wait.

Cathy Brett's warmly welcome arrival sees a brand new approach designed to re-launch Hampton Cottage as a historical and cultural centre for the local community. As well as new exhibitions and displays now being created ahead of the spring re-opening, the Museum will have a fresh image with more attractions, books and works by local craftspeople. It will also offer updated and comfortable space for those volunteers who give up their time regularly to act as stewards.

After a period of slow decline for the Society and the sad passing of too many of our longstanding contributors, Cathy's fresh approach marks a turning point in various ways. This month, for example, sees the return of our lecture programme at the Letherhead Institute with speaker Dr Daisy Dunn due to give an entertaining talk about Oxford. It may just have a local twist as she is a former resident of Fetcham with distinct knowledge of our own area.

See the Chairman's Report on Page 4 for news of one or two other initiatives as well as the Annual General Meeting in March when further announcements may be made.

This *Newsletter* is important too in recognising the passing of Edwina Vardey, another giant of the Society whose lasting legacy for the future includes both the definitive *History of Leatherhead* book and our valuable collection of recorded oral histories of local residents, all long gone but with many personal memories of a district that is unrecognisable today.

Read on. Our next edition should be out in the spring.

TONY MATTHEWS



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This *Newsletter* gives me the opportunity to welcome all to 2023 – a better year than any of the past three, I trust. In 2022 the L&DLHS Trustees have mostly met virtually and necessary corrective actions have not been taken.

Nevertheless, we warmly welcome Cathy Brett to the role of Curator at the Museum. Her work so far occupies several pages here and makes exciting reading.

She and I are also working with the team at Ashted Parish, led by Elizabeth Newhouse, to put on a three-day event at the Dell Centre, Park Lane, celebrating the creation of the Ashted Pottery. Over 12 years, veterans of the Great War developed remarkable skills in creating and decorating a wide variety of pots and figurines, supported by some of the most celebrated modellers of the day. The event, in April, will include a well-structured exhibition planned by Andy Carter and display material representing the L&DLHS. There will also be talks and demonstrations of pot-making with hands on opportunities.

Page 5 opposite announces our first lecture of 2023 with Dr Daisy Dunn talking about Oxford between the wars. She is a well established speaker and I urge you to join us. The follow-up programme is being developed and should be announced soon.

The 2022 AGM will be on 17 March when I propose to talk about prolific writer Beverley Nichols and his home from 1947-1957, Merry Hall, Agates Lane, Ashted. He wrote a trilogy of books mainly about his garden, cats and local personalities. The garden aspect is my way of paying tribute to the late Fred Meynen's horticultural interests. Sadly in 2022 we lost both him and Edwina Vardey whose obituary you can read on Page 13.

During the earlier part of this year, as well as preparing Museum exhibitions we will be spending a significant sum on further repairs following last year's unusually hot summer. However the Museum is expected to open normally this spring so on that positive note, I wish you all a Happy New Year.

JOHN ROWLEY

The Leatherhead & District Local History Society
invite you to our first history talk of 2023
when we welcome award-winning author,
historian and former Fetcham resident

Dr DAISY DUNN

OXFORD BETWEEN THE WARS

The Real Brideshead Revisited

7.30pm Friday 20th January 2023

Abraham Dixon Hall, Letherhead Institute

Open to members and visitors

Tickets £2 on the door

'Ground-breaking, award-winning, thought-provoking'

'Sparkling and fascinating' **Andrew Roberts**

'Elegantly erudite' **Antonia Fraser**

'Delightfully gossipy' **Country Life**



#HistoryLivesHere



MUSEUM NEWS



Above left: Artist Cathy Brett brings a colourful new approach as Curator at the Museum. (Copyright: Andy Newbold Photography)

Above right: Brand new logo for the Museum conveying its cottage personality.

WELCOME CATHY - GREAT THINGS LIE AHEAD by TONY MATTHEWS

Cathy Brett, artist, author, book illustrator and local resident, formally became Curator at Leatherhead Museum in August 2022, filling the gap left by Lorraine Spindler four years ago.

The Curator reports to the L&DLHS Executive Committee and liaises with the Museum Managers, stewards and Friends of the Museum.

Cathy first became involved with the Museum five years ago and was guest of honour at the re-opening ceremony on 8 April 2017 when she presented a stunning



Cathy's poster for the 70th

array of new exhibits that she had created personally to mark the Society's 70th anniversary. They included a clever new 'Curate Your Own Model Museum' facility for children using paper cut-outs.

Back in 2017, Cathy cut the ceremonial ribbon and received a bouquet of thanks. The exhibition that year focused on events seen and recorded over the previous 70 years, from flooding to drought to food tasting, pop music and the London Olympics. The River Mole was central to the time-line.

Three years later Cathy was back as guest lecturer in January 2020 when she told Society members about her own grandmother's youthful pen-friendship with a girl named Mary Anne MacLeod in the faraway Hebridean Isle of Lewis. Mary would later become the mother of one Donald Trump, undoubtedly the most controversial of all US Presidents!

Cathy's own gentle approach to art, design and life in general could hardly contrast more sharply with the former White House resident. Her *Collage of Nine Illustrated Faces*, shown here, presents a wistful but striking collection of faces from a wide variety of influences on her life. Not least her grandmother in the centre.



MUSEUM NEWS

BEHIND THE SCENES AT HAMPTON COTTAGE

by
CATHY BRETT



Since that sunny spring day early in 2022 when Museum display manager Dorothy Stapleton asked me ‘Would you be interested in the Curator’s job?’, I’ve been wondering and planning - wondering about what I might contribute to the Leatherhead Museum, then planning how I might guide it and its collection into the future.

I have also been studying, spending time at Hampton Cottage, meeting stewards and visitors, and enjoying the building and its treasures. Each visit confirmed to me that I’d made the right decision when I answered Dorothy with a ‘Yes’. I am thrilled to be taking on the Curator’s job and to have joined a dedicated and enthusiastic Museum team.

With a background in design education and managing visual arts projects, I knew I would need to begin my task with a thorough review. The central role of our Museum is to preserve and maintain a historic record of our town and environs, archives and artefacts in perpetuity. We are custodians of a wonderful collection, gathered by our predecessors, and we must preserve this valuable resource, while evolving, embracing new ideas and technology, and continuing to gather and record for future generations. It is quite a responsibility.

The Museum has another, equally important obligation: to share that resource with the town. Hampton Cottage is the interface between collection and community. Through our displays of artefacts, themed exhibits and events, we bring visitors into the building but we also reach out, taking the story of Leatherhead into our community.

As Curator, it will be my task, with the Museum team, to respond to this community, reflecting its demographic and diversity, offering a

programme of exhibits and events that engage our visitors and serve our local heritage.

It was clear from my initial investigations that a key challenge for the Museum is the building itself. Hampton Cottage, an important 17th century listed jewel, is very small. A low-ceiling, timber-frame, three-bay modest dwelling, it is not really surprising that many of our first-time visitors comment that they had ‘not noticed it before’ or ‘didn’t know Leatherhead even had a museum’.

It is a charming building, inside and out, but its bijoux proportions mean that we don’t have the luxury of spacious, multi-room display areas like, say, Haslemere, Farnham or Horsham Museums. Working within these constraints, our display solutions must be clever and innovative, finding alternative layouts and utilising technology in interesting ways to showcase our collections.

Another important challenge has been the impact of the last three years. As an organisation entirely run by volunteers, it is impressive that the Museum has maintained a regular stewarding rota and a programme of new exhibits.

Congratulations to managers Peter Humphreys and Duncan Macfarlane and the Museum Committee. The Museum volunteers are amazing and it is essential that we not only retain and nurture them but also recruit others to join this enthusiastic team.

No doubt we are all feeling the draining after-effects of the pandemic, not to mention political and financial upheavals of the last few months, and need to recharge our batteries. The Museum needs a boost too.

In the summer I began forming a new curatorial team to take on the urgent tasks of reviewing the collections, reinvigorating the Museum displays and devising exciting future exhibits. Together with the management team, I’ve now written a detailed Curatorial Plan to take us into 2023 and beyond, with short, medium and long-term goals.

We will be introducing new branding and logos, reflecting both our heritage role and our relevance in the 21st century, including our new *History Lives Here* slogan (see Page 40). We will be expanding the Museum shop to include more books and crafts by local makers, and providing a more comfortable and congenial space for our stewards.

We will also be starting a programme of refitting the display areas, adding more interactive exhibits and innovative multi-media solutions to bring history alive for our visitors.

Behind the scenes, we have already begun a comprehensive review of our collections, updating our cataloguing, with the intention of making our database fully searchable. We are hoping to make some exciting acquisitions too, adding to our 21st century artefacts as well as accepting donations of locally significant items.

We would love to hear from anyone who might like to join the curatorial team, particularly if you are interested in digital archiving, conservation, interactive displays, video and audio production or shop merchandising.

MUSEUM NEWS

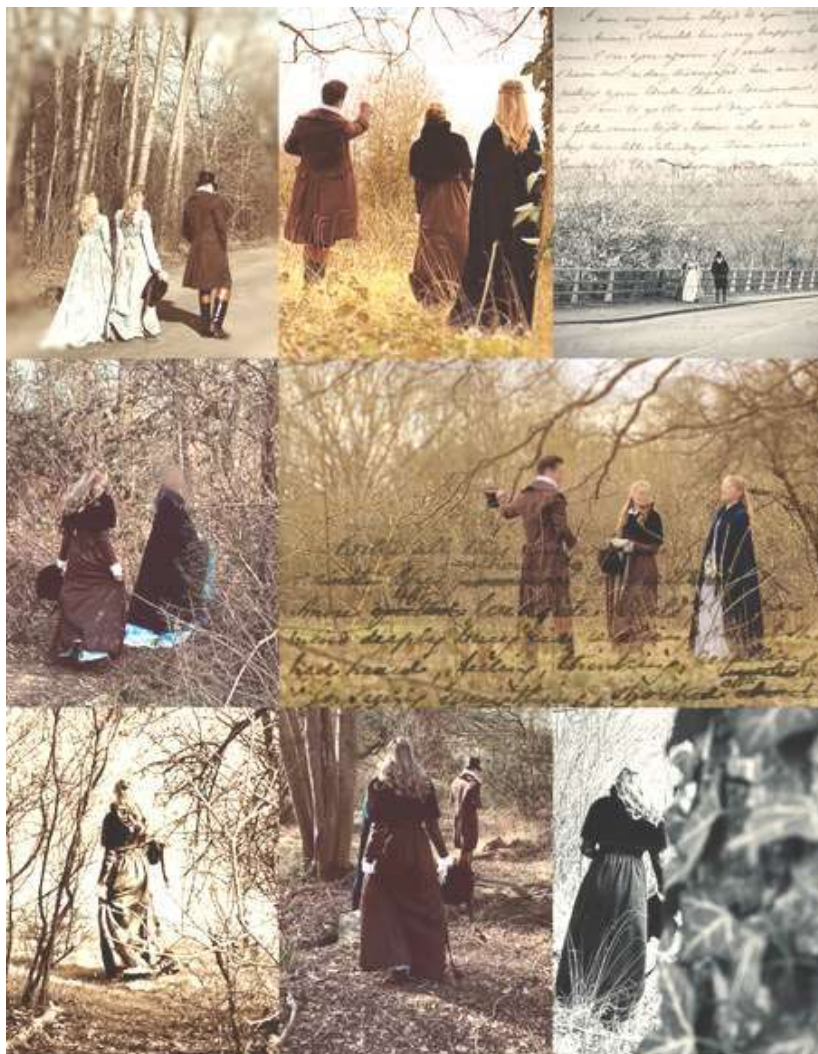
A grand reopening of Leatherhead Museum is scheduled for the end of March. Over the winter Cathy and her team are working hard, cleaning and updating Museum favourites like the Kitchen, Ashted Pottery and the archaeological displays. But they are also installing a brand new first headline exhibition to be entitled ‘Jane Austen’s Leatherhead’.

Cathy has been working closely with another stalwart of local history, art and culture, Lucy Quinnell. Together their collaborative research and creative art came up with The LiterARTY Collective in ‘A Regency Happening’, an event staged in March last year 2022, supported by Mole Valley District Council and formally launched at Lucy’s Rowhurst estate during Heritage Open Days in September.

The exhibition at the Museum will include costumes made and worn by The LiterARTY Collective last year. They will be shown alongside artworks, photographs and videos, plus maps, illustrations and



Lucy Quinnell



Created by
**THE LiterARTY
 Collective**

with the support of



Collage image of Regency figures at the event staged by The LiterARTY Collective in March 2022. Overleaf: Three of the costumes to be exhibited at the Museum from March 2023.



artefacts from the museum’s Georgian and Regency archives.

The exhibition will explore the notion that novelist Jane Austen based the fictional town of Highbury in her book *Emma* on our very own Leatherhead. Cathy’s team will present evidence and encourage visitors to contribute their own thoughts on the real people and places that might well have inspired Miss Austen more than 200 years ago. Box Hill appears under its own name.

They are also planning a series of linked outreach projects, including ‘Walking in Jane Austen’s Footsteps’, a guided walk around local places that might have inspired *Emma*.

Cathy says: ‘We are keeping our plans for a theatrically-themed summer exhibition under our bonnets for now, but I can assure you that Easter 2023 will be full of excitement, intrigue, delight and astonishment. I can’t wait to share it all with you and welcome you back to our Museum as your new Curator.’

OBITUARY

EDWINA MARY VARDEY (1924-2022)



Edwina Vardey held a uniquely important role for the L&DLHS, not as an office holder but as the editor of *History of Leatherhead: A Town at the Crossroads*, the definitive reference book for anyone interested in the town. Published in 1988 after years of research work involving many contributors whose efforts she coordinated, it was republished in a shorter form in 1991 and remains essential reading today.

Her other vital contribution was conducting more than 30 oral history interviews of longstanding local residents from every corner of society. Recorded between 1979 and 2002, they introduce a society dating back to the start of the 20th century and let us hear people describing their own daily lives within the Leatherhead district, from the wealthiest to the most humble. Most of the interviews can still be heard online or read via the L&DLHS website and archived *Newsletters*. In some cases the speakers have rural Surrey accents now lost forever with passing time.

Edwina Mary Vardey died 23 October 2022 aged 98 years and three weeks. Her funeral at the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Spirit in Fetcham was held on 18 November. Her son Giles Edwin read a eulogy on behalf of his sisters Edwina, Natalie and Melissa, grandchildren and other close relatives.

He said: 'Our family has a long association with this church, going right back to its consecration in 1968. As a family we served as

choristers, organists, altar boys, flower arrangers and even provided some carpentry from my father. My mother was active on various church and religious committees here, as well as discussion groups covering ecumenical topics right through to Vatican 2 and beyond.

‘She set an early example to us all that if you want to change or influence things, then you have to get involved. Mum did that: she got involved, often throughout her life.’

He spoke of Edwina’s sparkling personality, deep curiosity and enthusiasm for people. She had ‘an ‘unconditional positive regard for people, for family, friends, and everyone else she encountered.’

Edwina Mary Hollingshead was born 1 October 1924, in Battersea, London. Her mother, Anne, thought she was living in Chelsea. Edwina’s only sister Shelagh was born a few years later and they grew up together happily at Waldegrave Gardens in Twickenham.

Their father, Edwin Hollingshead, was an editor at Odhams, the publishers, and edited *John Bull* magazine, a populist journal which had been the mouthpiece of the notorious demagogue Horatio Bottomley. Edwina’s mother Anne had worked for the *Irish Free Press* and claimed to have had a scoop on the sinking of the liner *Lusitania* in 1915. She said she had been on the quayside at Kinsale as they brought the survivors of the German torpedo ashore. She emigrated to England in 1916, working initially at Woolwich Arsenal before meeting Edwin.

‘It was clear that journalism and literary interests were in my mother’s blood from her parents, right from the start.’

Edwina went to St Catherine’s School in Twickenham and then Gumley House in Isleworth where she used to complain about her punishment for failing to wear the obligatory brown knickers during gym practice. Instead, she sported some dark blue ones which incurred the wrath of the teachers.

Her father encouraged her to avoid learning shorthand typing as she would only be offered secretarial roles. Instead, she joined Odhams publishers as a layout artist after a short spell at Kingston art school.

Edwin died of lung cancer in 1942 aged 48 and Edwina joined the voluntary aid detachment as a nurse in the Royal Navy. She was posted to Plymouth, then Milford Haven and on to Inverary and

finally Scapa Flow in the Orkney islands. She enjoyed the Navy's traditional daily tot of rum and would later tell her teenage son: 'You know darling, I was the only nurse amongst 10,000 sailors.'

One of the more striking episodes of her time there, and an event that affected her deeply, was helping to exhume US servicemen who had been buried in Orkney. She witnessed them being dug up, dog tags logged, removed from English oak coffins, and redressed in new uniforms and sent to America for reburial.

Through mutual friends from Glasgow, Edwina met Lew Vardey, a young artist, designer and musician, and they were married in 1948. They lived at first in Bloomsbury where their first daughter Lucinda was born in 1949. But they liked the Surrey Hills, having picnicked on Box Hill, and decided to move to Lower Road, Fetcham where Melissa was born in 1953, Natalie in 1955, Giles in 1956 and the younger Edwina in 1960.

Grandmother Anne came to live with them in 1960 and became wise counsel and babysitter, enabling Edwina to pursue her wide variety of interests in literature, art, history, and the Catholic church while rearing five children in a busy household.

She launched herself into many different cultural spheres, wanting to be defined as something much more than a middle class housewife and mother. During one Christmas Eve drinks party a tipsy local dignitary called the family a 'bunch of bloody bohemians' and Edwina was delighted.

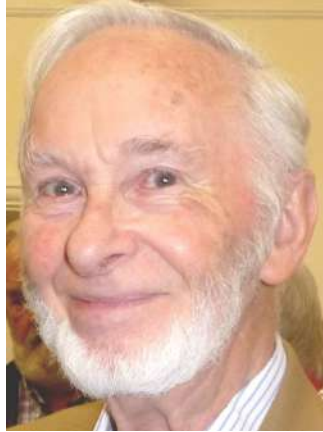
Besides being an early pioneer of book clubs and discussion groups on church matters, her high point was producing the book *History of Leatherhead: A Town at the Crossroads* for the L&DLHS. Lew designed it and she recorded many local people's recollections for the content. Her oral histories were later edited for the website and *L&DLHS Newsletter*.

She gave talks on the Tudor palaces of Surrey, organised readings for the blind, was involved in the Arts Alive Festival, the local arts society and many other cultural events. She was also a regular hospital visitor and interviewed one patient who had served on the Murmansk convoys from 1918-21 where Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, was trying to send arms and supplies to the White Russians fighting the Bolsheviks. She later spotted this was an

important part of history with echoes of today's support for Ukraine.

She went on to run creative writing classes well into her nineties and organise Penny Readings of their stories at Leatherhead's Thorndike Theatre. A cultural polymath, she touched many people's lives with humour, enthusiasm, and warmth. Some years after Lew's death in 1995, she moved from Fetcham into Leatherhead where she continued to pursue her interests and see friends.

**EDWINA'S PENNY
READINGS
by Bill Whitman**



Bill Whitman

It all started when Cassie Walters decided to introduce Bookham to the University of the Third Age in 1983. She led a team of volunteers to Bookham Village Day to enroll candidate members and identify potential leaders of the proposed new study groups. One of the new groups suggested was Creative Writing and Sheila Warner persuaded her good friend Edwina Vardey to lead it.

I was one of the first pupils, attracted by the expertise of Edwina, well-known locally as editor of the book *A History of Leatherhead*, the contents of which were then being collated. It was published in 1988.

Our first meetings were rather stilted affairs, getting to know one another, but gradually we relaxed and began to try to write originally and creatively. Edwina would talk to us at each fortnightly meeting about the need to be able to write interestingly and originally on any subject, avoiding the trite and obvious.

She would then set us a new subject to write about before our next meeting. As with any new writing group, different members had their own ideas of what they wanted to write. One of our first members was keen to develop more effective methods of writing letters to the editors of broad-sheet newspapers.

We tried to publicise our class and attract new writers by arranging a

Creative Writing session in the course of Bookham Village Week but this did not achieve much. Then came Arts Alive. In 1994 this was introduced as an opportunity to devote October throughout Mole Valley to a celebration of all aspects of performing arts.

Edwina joined enthusiastically on behalf of the Creative Writing group, welcoming the opportunity to showcase the progress of her students. She devised a revived format of Penny Readings, based on the Victorian tradition of ‘entertainment by locals for locals, for the princely sum of one penny.’

Edwina arranged all the venues, dates, collaborators and publicity. Any offers of help or enquiries about costs were gently ignored. Our job was to identify our choice of our best writing, occasionally to shorten or adjust a piece to fit a theme.

She would select a programme based on six writing themes that we had tackled through the year. Each writer had a chance to read, usually four, of their pieces. The programme was always divided into two halves, with an interval for interaction, conversation, a glass of wine and a little music. The musicians were usually selected from Edwina’s local contacts and it was fun to see these young people mature. One performer was a young busker who attracted attention, another a well-known local guitar player.

The initial venue for Penny Readings was Corbett’s Bookshop in the Swan Centre. Peter Snell, our wonderful host, would move the book-stacks to clear space for readers, musicians and audience. It was unorthodox but effective. Then the bookshop had to move and he took over the mock-Tudor building on the corner of Bridge Street as Barton’s. This did not work as well since space was quite limited and the musicians and audience were cramped.



Peter Snell

Once again Edwina worked her magic and we were permitted to use the Green Room high up in Leatherhead Theatre. I well remember Edwina’s delight that our publicity for the new venue included the phrase ‘lift available’.

The new venue was a success. The room was big enough, unencumbered, with good audibility. We had to exercise some ingenuity to tempt our clientele upstairs, away from the theatre facilities, and to provide them with a restorative drink at the interval but they came willingly enough.

This applied even in 2015 when, due to a misunderstanding, our entry was omitted from the Arts Alive brochure. We had audiences of about 50 with enthusiastic feed-back. But time was catching up with us. It was becoming increasingly difficult to make all the arrangements even though we were greatly assisted by Edwina's youngest daughter and a loyal friend, Gill.

Our last performance of Penny Readings was in 2017. Edwina's deteriorating health prevented continuation of Penny Readings but the Creative Writing group kept going via Zoom through the trials of Covid and still operates as one of the Bookham U3A study groups.

FEATURE

REVEREND GEORGE SHEPHEARD BIRD (1871–1946) AND THE BIRD FAMILY OF THE GRANGE



VIVIEN WHITE (left) gave a talk on Rev George Shepheard Bird to the Friends of St Nicolas Church, Great Bookham, on 29 June 2022. He was Rector of the church 1905-1925 and son of Arthur Bird, owner of The Grange in Rectory Lane.

George was born at 61 Belsize Park Gardens, Hampstead on 30 August 1871. His parents, Arthur and Jane Mary Bird, had married in 1869. They were remotely related and had known each other as children. By the time George was born they had already had their first son, Arthur Horace Bird in July 1870. George would have two more brothers and two sisters.

His father, Arthur, was a solicitor and partner of a successful



Rev George Bird
(1871-1946)

practice called Peake, Bird & Co in the City (now part of Charles Russell Speechly) in Bedford Row, Holborn. He also came from a wealthy family which had originally owned and worked brickworks in Kensington. They developed parts of Hammersmith and Kensington, from which George's great-grandfather, Stephen, and his grandfather, also called George Bird, had made their fortunes.

Many family members were members of the Worshipful Company of Tylers and Bricklayers, chartered in 1568 and one of the oldest livery companies in the City. Some family members are

still represented on the governing body today, although no longer involved in building or development.

The Birds provided about 20 Masters of the Company and Arthur was already Clerk of the Company when George was born, having been appointed in 1865. He would serve in that capacity until 1907.

George's unusual middle name, Shephard, was Jane Mary's maiden name. Her father was the eccentric Samuel Shephard who was orphaned at an early age and brought up by his paternal aunt and uncle who owned the Crown Inn in Leamington. Samuel was apprenticed to a pastry cook but broke his indentures and ran away to sea. He rose to become a purser on the new steamers in the P&O (Peninsular and Oriental) Mail ships.

This seems to be how he ended up in Egypt in 1842 when he was put ashore for insubordination with only a shilling in his pocket and without his belongings. He found work in a Greek café. By 1844 he was working at Hill's Hotel in Cairo and had married Mary Range-croft, who was travelling with a family to India. Their daughter, Jane Mary was born in 1845 following the death of an older brother.

In 1846 Shephard took over the hotel, borrowing money to do so. He was to make his fortune from European travellers and from British army officers staying there as they travelled to and from the

Crimean War (1853-1856). The war spread cholera and Jane Mary's new brother died of it in 1855. Her father then sent his wife and daughter back to live in England at Eathorpe Hall, Wappenbury, Warwickshire.

Samuel Shephard himself did not return home to retire permanently until 1860 and he died in 1866 aged 50, his health ruined by his time in Egypt. His wife died a few years later in 1870 and Jane Mary inherited his wealth along with three younger sisters.

When her son George was seven, his wealthy paternal grandfather, George Bird, died and his father, Arthur, shared the wealth with his five brothers and four sisters. Seven years later in April 1885, George was sent to Harrow aged 14. He went on to Trinity College, Cambridge in June 1891 at 19, graduating in 1894.

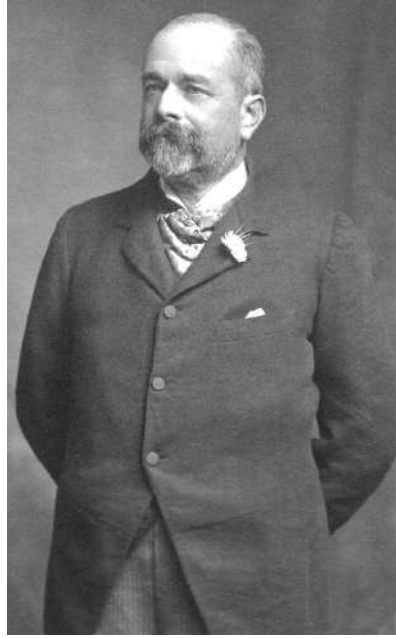
He had decided to join the Church of England and was ordained a deacon in 1895. In 1896 he was ordained a priest at Ripon and he had two periods as a curate 1895-1899 in Kirkstall, Yorkshire and 1899-1905 at St Mary's, Dover. It was while he was at Kirkstall that he met and later married Eliza Muriel Nickols on 8 May 1900. Eliza's father was a very wealthy leather manufacturer.

Meanwhile, George's father Arthur had bought The Grange in Great Bookham in 1894 and moved the family there. George's older brother, Arthur Horace, made his fortune running Shephard's Hotel in Cairo and is known as the founder of Egyptian tourism.

George also had two younger brothers and two younger sisters who were then between 11 and 21 years old.

Arthur senior bought The Grange as a country house to live a country life style. Like earlier owners he loved to shoot game. He was probably also cutting back on his work as a solicitor. Possibly of most importance in choosing Great Bookham was the opening of the railway line through Bookham to London by the London and South Western Railway Company in 1885. This would have given him an easy commute to London. According to George's son, Arthur Leyland, Arthur senior sent George and his brother Gerald down by train to look at The Grange and they reported back on it favourably.

We all think of The Grange as looking like it does today but when Arthur bought it, it would have looked quite similar to Sole Farm, also in Great Bookham. When George Augustus Seawell, the then



Above: George's parents, Jane Mary and Arthur Bird.

owner, turned it into a gentleman's house in 1850 he added Tudor-style beams as they were the fashion at the time.

One of the first things Arthur did in December 1894 after moving into The Grange was to obtain an order from Surrey Quarter Sessions allowing him to close part of Rectory Lane so that he could divert it to give him a front lawn and a drive up to the house.

It is family legend that he had The Grange moved into Great Bookham from Little Bookham so that he could become a churchwarden at St Nicolas as he preferred that to Little Bookham Parish Church. The latter was low Anglican while St Nicolas was high. In fact The Grange has been in Great Bookham as far back as records go, as evidenced from old maps including the 1842 Tithe Map. It was also very difficult to move land between parishes.

In 1898 Arthur added a grand music room to the north side of the house. It was probably at that time that he re-faced the front of the house, covering the Elizabethan-style timbers to match the new music



Above: The Bird family in June 1908. George is at the back in the middle, Eliza second from left at back, son Arthur Leyland in front row third from left.

room. They are still visible at the back of the house. He added the grand conservatory in 1914. The old stables were also turned into servants' quarters. The house itself has had no further extensions although the charity has since added buildings in the grounds.

Arthur Bird quickly became known and involved in the village. According to L&DLHS founder Stephen Fortescue, Arthur was elected to the new parish council in 1894 by a show of hands while William Keswick JP, MP for Epsom and owner of Eastwick Park, Rector Rev Edward Malleson and Mrs Mary Chrystie - all major personalities in Bookham - were not elected. However, these three later got in when the result was overturned and a poll held.

Mr Keswick was elected parish chairman as he possessed the highest status in the village. However, Arthur also became a JP and was elected chairman of the Epsom Bench. After Keswick's death in 1912, Arthur assumed the highest status in Bookham and so was elected chairman of the parish council, a post he held until 1918.

Arthur Bird would also buy and develop a great deal of other land in both Great and Little Bookham. It was said he walked all the way

from The Grange to St Nicolas on Sundays without leaving his own property. Much of the Little Bookham manor estate was sold off in 1907 by the new lord of the manor and Arthur bought the 81 acres of Preston Farm, land the Seawells had merely rented.

It was described as freehold building land but Arthur Bird did not build on it, maybe because he enjoyed shooting game there. It later became Green Belt and has remained undeveloped so far although the new Mole Valley Plan in 2022 has allocated it for building.

Arthur also bought 69 acres of land in Great Bookham to the east of Little Bookham Street, notably Sole Farm. Much of this he did develop, effectively joining the two Bookhams for the first time. In Lloyd-George's Valuation Survey of 1909 Arthur Bird is listed as owning at least 251 acres in Great and Little Bookham of which 69 acres was The Grange and the land opposite it.

In around 1900 he bought the advowson of St Nicolas Church for £2000 from Lord Down who owned The Grove but was leaving Great Bookham to live at his estate in Yorkshire. Arthur was able to present George as Rector when Rev Malleson died in 1905. The nomination was approved by the Bishop and George achieved his promotion from a curate at the age of 34.

According to the family, he had been about to be appointed Vicar of Deal when Rev Malleson died. The Surrey Directory at the



time said the Rectory income was £525 with a residence (the building has since been demolished) and 6½ acres of glebe land. George would be Rector of St Nicolas for 20 years.

His mother Jane Mary died in July 1909 aged 62. George and his siblings dedicated a window in the church to her and Arthur erected a new church porch in her memory.

George made an instant impact as Rector. At the first Vestry meeting that he chaired he objected to the church being locked on weekdays and also to empty seats being reserved for wealthier parishioners in the centre of the church while others were crowded around the sides. He got electric lighting installed and the community thrived under his leadership.

He also became his father's right-hand man in the village. At a meeting of the parish council in November 1905, chaired by Arthur Bird, George was elected to replace Rev Malleison. It was common in those days for Rectors to sit on parish councils.

George also became first chairman of the Bookham Community Association (BCA) at his father's request after Arthur donated the Old Barn Hall to the village. George would chair the BCA until he left the village.

When he and Eliza moved into the Rectory they already had two sons, Arthur Leyland, born 1902, who would follow George into the church and become a canon, and Brian Hamilton, born 1903 who became a barrister. While in Great Bookham they also had a third son, David George Fraser, born 1910, who joined the Royal Navy, had a distinguished career and retired a Commander.

George was deeply affected by the First World War. His address in January 1915 is recorded: 'The New Year has opened in a mighty clash of arms, and war still rages between the great nations of the world. We feel, and rightly feel, that we as a nation cannot lay down arms until there is a real prospect of a rightful and abiding peace, much as we abhor the horrors and sufferings which this conflict entails. And so whilst grimly and stubbornly we go forward, we must ever keep in mind the thought of peace, a peace which shall bring the nations to the knowledge of its true meaning.'

He spent the second half of 1917 as a chaplain with the Church Army at Dunkirk. Earlier that year he had established the Parochial



Above: The Grange in 1910.

Church Council at the wish of the Bishop. It was agreed this would consist of 12 members – the Rector and two church wardens as officers with nine elected members, three of whom had to be women. In fact four women were elected, joined by Eliza who was co-opted.

In 1921 George declined the traditional Easter gift to the Rector saying that although he approved of it in principle as part of his salary, it should remain in abeyance while he held the post. As he was independently wealthy he did not need the extra money.

George was also chaplain of the Tylers and Bricklayers Company which he had followed family tradition by joining in 1892. He was Master of the Company from 1929-30, a very prestigious role. In 1943 he presented a Book of Common Prayer with the Company's Arms on the cover to mark his 50 years as a Tyler and Bricklayer and at his death he left £100 to purchase a rosewater dish and ewer.

His father Arthur had been Clerk of the Company for 42 years from 1865 to 1907 and was nicknamed 'Father of the Company'. He was succeeded as Clerk until 1940 by George's older brother, Arthur Horace, and the position then passed to his own son, Arthur John, who held it until 1971. George's younger brother, Major Lawrence

Bird DSO,OBE, preceded George as Master in 1928-9 and his other brother, Major Gerald Bird MC, was Master from 1926-27.

It is obviously hard to exaggerate the importance of the Company to the Bird family and vice-versa. In 1927, five members held prominent positions. They presented a silver gilt loving-cup to mark the year.

George was also a skilled water-colour painter and produced a work of St Nicolas Church which has survived. In November 1925, after 20 years as Rector, he resigned to become Vicar at Rowledge. He was 54 at the time and was perhaps moving to the more junior post in order to take life easier. He may also have wanted a life independent of his father.

Arthur Bird had married again in 1920, aged 77, to Lilian Amy Stiles, 40, a sick nurse. From all accounts the family accepted her and looked after her after Arthur's death in 1931. He is buried in the graveyard at St Nicolas with both of his wives beside him.

In George's farewell to the Parochial Church Council he thanked them for their many past services. He also asked for it to be recorded that he had opposed placing the organ in the Slyfield Chapel some years earlier as he thought the chapel should be used for its original purpose. William Keswick had paid for a new organ in 1912 and it had been placed in the Slyfield Chapel. In 1936 it was removed from there to its present location. However, there is also a small modern organ in the Slyfield Chapel today.

After leaving Great Bookham, George went to America in 1934 and visited the Niagara Falls. He retired as Vicar of Rowledge in 1936. In 1939 he and Eliza were living with their son Brian Hamilton at Wickham House, West Street in Farnham. George was listed as an air raid warden and Brian a special constable with the Metropolitan Police. He later moved to Sandford House in the same street.

George died on 6 October 1946 in Belfast. He was brought back and buried in the churchyard at St Nicolas just three days later with the ceremony officiated by his son the Rev Arthur Leyland Bird, then Vicar of Burgh Heath. Rev George Bird left £35,000 in his will, a considerable sum at that time.

FEATURE

A MILL ON THE RYE by BRIAN BOUCHARD

In the Domesday Book created soon after the Norman Conquest of 1066, Ashtead (Stede), Surrey, was not credited with any mill, possibly because the Rye brook was the village's only significant watercourse and, close to its source, the flow was insufficient to power a mill-race.

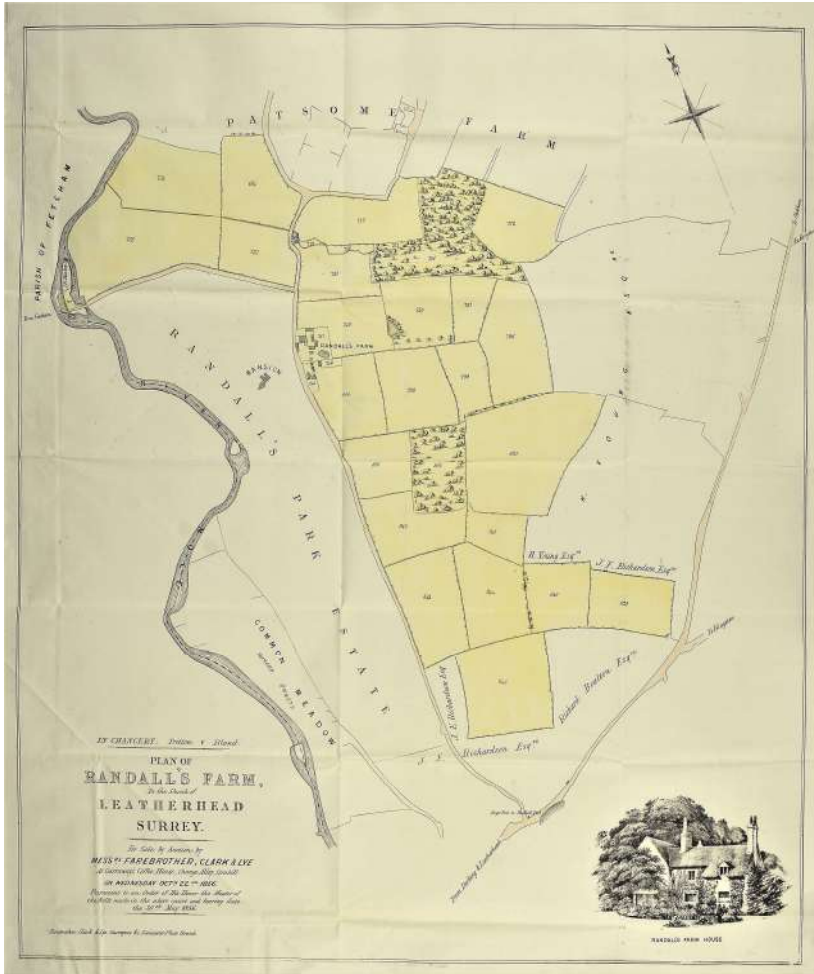
A Domesday mill was sited on the west end of an island standing between the north and south branches of the River Mole at Fetcham Splash. The boundary between Fetcham and Leatherhead crossed the island from one branch of the river to the other in order to include the mill within Fetcham parish.

Leatherhead (Leret) was said to have a mill held in two half shares (*ii dimidii molini*) in the demesne lands of Pachenesham so this might refer to the Fetcham mill. However, the counterpart fractions cannot be matched with certainty and a moiety in Chessington could be associated with the Rye mill and another, on land of Bishop Odo of Bayeux, with one on the River Mole.

Surrey Assize Rolls record that in 1235 a man was crushed to death by a cart at Pachenesham Mill. The vehicle concerned was forfeited as a 'deodand'. This was something forfeited or given to God. Specifically, in law, it was an object or instrument forfeited to the Crown after causing someone's death. The law decreed that it be applied to pious uses and distributed in alms by the King's high almoner. What actually happened remains unclear.

In June 1308, Piers Gaveston, friend of King Edward II, was granted free warren of all demesne lands in Pachenesham after Eustace de Hacche reportedly granted them to the king. Gaveston then sold the manor to Robert Darcy in 1309. When Darcy died in 1343, Pachenesham was a capital messuage worth nothing beyond outgoings, a pigeonhouse worth 2s a year, 200 water-logged acres, eight acres of meadow, ten acres of wood and a watermill worth 13s 4d a year beyond outgoings.

The manor passed to Darcy's son-in-law, John de Argentan, and



Above: Map from 1856 showing the location of Randall's Farm.

in turn to his son-in-law, Ivo fitzWarin, who leased it to William Wymeldon in 1386. By 1393 the rents in kind remained unpaid, and fitzWarin sued Wymeldon, alleging that he had dug sand and clay for sale and had taken down various houses within the manor and sold the timber.

The 'houses' specified included a hall worth £40; two chambers; a chapel; two barns and two watermills each worth 20 marks; two

byres and a hay house and a dovehouse, each worth 10 marks; and two stables each worth £10.

FitzWarin also claimed that Wymeldon had cut down 30 oaks and 30 ash trees, each worth 4s and, in the gardens, 20 pear trees and 30 apple trees each worth 2s. Overall, the damages were put at £300.

The jury found that Wymeldon had pulled down a stable and sold its timbers to the value of 17s 6d and had cut down three oaks worth 10d each. Judgement for three times the damage - one-hundredth of the claim - went to FitzWarin. After his death in 1414, the inquest found there was a certain site and a pigeonhouse worth nothing beyond outgoings in the manor of Pachenesham.

The Pachenesham mill mentioned in 1343 is believed to have existed on the Rye brook at Spring Pond some 350 yards north of Gutters Bridge on the Randalls Road. In 1398 the manor was said to have had two mills but the location of a second is uncertain.

By the 14th century Ashted had built a windmill (le molde) on the South Common Field ('le sutfelde de Asstede'), between Pebble Lane and Cole Croft Hedge, later known as Windmill Hill. This would have drawn grinding of corn back from Pachenesham watermill and hastened its demise. No mill was mentioned in a Pachenesham rental for 1509.

The bridge at Pachenesham, called 'Goderychesbrygg', was the crossing of the route from Leatherhead to Pachenesham on the Rye known to this day as Gutters Bridge (National Grid TQ 152575). In 1472 a Pachenesham jury found they had no cucking stool, and that the pillory, stocks and the bridge called 'Goodryche Brygge' 'were utterly ruined through the lord's neglect.'

Earthworks at The Mounts stand at the top of a scarp running down to the Rye, itself flowing southwest to feed the Mole. It was dammed up just below the earthwork to form Spring Pond, within Bushy Plat. On the 1932 OS Map the connection from River Lane, off Randalls Road, Leatherhead, is still described as 'Oldmill Bridge'.

In Chancery,

TRITTON v. BLAND.

LEATHERHEAD, SURREY.

The Particulars and Conditions of Sale
OF
THE VALUABLE ESTATE
KNOWN AS
RANDALL'S FARM,
SITUATE
WITHIN A MILE OF THE TOWN OF LEATHERHEAD,
SURREY,

Immediately opposite to the RANDALL'S PARK ESTATE, and within easy access of London, and
only a short remove from Epsom, Dorking, Guildford and Kingston;

CONTAINS
A RESIDENCE, with Pleasure and Kitchen Gardens,
CAPITAL OUT-BUILDINGS, AND

TWO HUNDRED & EIGHT ACRES
Of Arable, Pasture, Meadow and Wood Land,
Partly **FREEHOLD**, and partly Copyhold of the Manor of Pockenham.

AND
A PEW IN LEATHERHEAD CHURCH.

Which will be Sold by Auction,

(Pursuant to an Order of His Honor the Master of the Rolls, made in a Cause of TRITTON v. BLAND,
and bearing date the 30th May, 1856)

BY MESSRS.

FARBROTHER, CLARK & LYE

At Garraway's Coffee House, Change Alley, Cornhill,

On **WEDNESDAY, the 22nd of OCTOBER, 1856,**

AT TWELVE O'CLOCK, IN ONE LOT.

May be Viewed on application to Mr. Harvey, at Randall's Farm (House) and Particulars may be had of Mr. DAVIS,
Solicitor, 16, Finsbury Lane; at Garraway's; and at the Offices of Messrs. FARBROTHER, CLARK & LYE,
No. 6, Leadenhall Place, Street, London.

J. Harvey and Son, Printers, 117, Strand, 1856.

FEATURE

THE CHANGING FACE OF LEATHERHEAD by **BILL WHITMAN**

When I first moved to Leatherhead in 1971 I acquired a copy of the newly published sixth post-war edition of the *Official Guide to Leatherhead and District*. There was no mention then of a merger with Dorking to form Mole Valley [the following year].

In both the Chairman's foreword and the introduction there is mention of the research establishments. The Chairman writes: 'In addition several important research establishments are located in Leatherhead.' In the introduction: 'Employment is provided by light industries, the research establishments, business houses and to a lesser extent agriculture. Leatherhead in the post-war years has become an important centre for research and a number of research associations have established themselves in the district. A special section is given to these on pages 165-175.'

The special section lists six research organisations: BCURA Industrial Laboratories, the British Food Manufacturing Industries Research Association, the Electricity Council Appliance Testing Laboratories, Central Electricity Research Laboratories (CERL), the Research Association for the Paper and Board, Printing and Packaging Industries (PIRA), and the Electrical Research Association.

These provided an estimated employment of about 20,000 jobs in an area of 100 acres, including a high proportion of graduates. Leatherhead saw an advantage in providing a source of employment for graduate level staff so that numbers of commuters coming to work in Leatherhead each day roughly balanced those commuting out each day to London without placing a burden of needs for social housing.

The research association concept had been formulated after the 1914-18 war. It aimed to provide fiscal incentives for manufacturing firms to join together in supporting research work that encouraged innovation and progressed manufacturing standards.

In 1971 this was still very much the favoured policy and research associations flourished. By way of example the turnover figures for

the Food RA are estimated to be:

	1951	1971	1991	2011
Turnover [£]	37,000	593,000	7 million	9 million

Later governments withdrew the fiscal incentives. Cooperatively funded research became less popular and by 1990 the role of cooperative research was increasingly questioned. The research associations fell out of favour and the once flourishing sites were sold off. The history of the Food RA has been described by Holmes and Whitman in *L&DLHS Proceedings*, Vol 7, pp 31-40.

BCURA was the first to go and its site has been redeveloped as a number of business sites, some now flourishing and some in sad decay. The former PIRA site was rebuilt as the headquarters of the Police Federation and an avenue of flats.

The Food RA science business was sold and the site sold off for re-development as housing. The CERL site was sold to Surrey Police for a short while as a potential new headquarters although that has now been abandoned.

It has been a story of a slow start, rapid growth and then sad decline. All that lovely green Randalls Farm land, redeveloped from an attractive research park into a warren of run-down factory sites and housing developments.

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 four appeared in the June and September 2022 *Newsletters*. Here are FRANK HASLAM's summaries of two more.



DEAD WOMAN'S LANE, 1734

Lady Diana Turnor, crippled granddaughter of the Earl of Salisbury, was visiting Leatherhead's annual fair accompanied by the two Miss Dacres from the Clergy House, then located next to the parish church.

Lady Diana had been carried there in her sedan chair. Whenever she attended the church she was always carried in her sedan chair into the porch of the church where she would sit for the whole service.

Grace Hudson, her maid and companion, was the daughter of Edward Hudson, a staunch Protestant yeoman who had bought the Lynk House, the old name of today's Priory. According to a tradition dating back to pre-Puritan days, the owners had to provide a link or candle to burn before the shrine of St Nicholas.

Grace was allowed to go and have her fortune told but in the crowd her purse was stolen. A polite gentleman came to her aid and beguiled her long past the time allowed by her mistress.

Miss Sally Wallin, a renowned bone-setter from Epsom, arrived in coach and four and saw the gentleman paying attention to Grace. He was actually a footman called Hill Mapp, employed by a chemist in Ludgate Hill. With his plausible ways he had developed a relationship with Sally and extracted a promise of marriage from her.

He hurriedly departed after Grace promised to see him again. Of course Sally was furious but he began to return regularly to meet Grace, telling her about his grand life.



Above: Lady Diana Turnor is still present in the porch at Leatherhead parish church.

Foolishly, Grace told him she had £100 left to her by her mother. One evening in Dead Man's Lane, past Thorncroft House, Mapp proposed they elope to London in ten days time. Grace did not know what to do.

Sally saw Mapp returning to Epsom. Her suspicions were aroused and they quarrelled. She broke it off with him. Mapp was heavily in debt and now Sally was on her guard while he was desperate.

Sally decided to talk to Grace who unburdened her own concerns to the sympathetic stranger. Sally told Grace that an old dame fortune teller had recently come to the wishing well at Ashted. Their conversation was overheard by Mapp.

A very confused Grace decided there was no harm in checking to see whether the old dame really was in Ashted. The well - dry and disused in modern times - was then called the Physical Well and had the same medicinal properties as the one at Epsom.

Grace was startled when a little old woman appeared beside her at the well. The old dame seemed to know her predicament. On payment of a crown, Grace received a small packet of pellets which she had to consume at the place and hour of assignation. But the old dame was actually Hill Mapp himself in disguise. He had made the pellets using knowledge from his work with the chemist.

That night Grace went to Dead Man's Lane and swallowed the pellets. She felt strange and collapsed. Mapp stepped out from behind a tree and took the little reticule containing Grace's money from her lifeless hand. 'They will call this place Dead Woman's Lane after this,' he said, 'and probably that will be a true title. I've done with her.'

Grace was found the next morning. The coroner's verdict was that she had taken her own life and in accordance with the laws of the day, she had to be buried at midnight at the cross-roads with a stake through her heart. Sally heard the news with alarm while Mapp affected profound regret.

By chance, the story was heard by a young Italian Jew in Epsom. The action of the pellets was similar to that of the recently discovered *Venenum Muthographicum* for which he himself was an agent. He rode immediately to Leatherhead, arriving late at night and made his way to the cross-roads where he demanded that the procedure be

stopped so that he could inspect the corpse. His suspicions were well founded. He forced the contents of a phial down Grace's throat, fervently crossing himself and praying - much to the consternation of Grace's father - but Grace duly revived.

The next day was Sunday and Leatherhead parish church was full. People had come to see the house next door where Grace lay recovering from her ordeal.

Hill Mapp was seated next to Sally Wallin. A note was received during the service stating that the would-be murderer of Grace Hudson was there in the church. He ran out to evade his pursuers but in the porch he plunged headlong into Lady Diana's sedan chair.

He was carried off to Epsom and stood trial but eventually regained his liberty and two years later the foolish Sally Wallin married him on 11 August 1736. Within a fortnight he robbed and deserted her, leaving her in such poverty that when she died heart-broken, a year later, she had a pauper's burial.

What of the young Italian Jew? Grace's father overcame his prejudice and assented to his marriage to Grace.

THE ERMYN'S WAY AND THE DRUID'S GROVE

Labius Constans was a young Roman centurion serving with XX Legion in camp at Cherkley. They were working on Stane Street. He had learned some of the local language and was successful in picking up intelligence during operations in the woods.

One July evening he visited friends at the camp in Ashtead, responsible for foraging for the main legion. He had come for Falerian wine as Cherkley camp's supply had been pilfered and spoiled by slaves, who had been punished.

Ashtead camp had nearly caught Tarak, the most powerful local Druid among the otherwise amenable Regni tribe. Tarak had been about to sacrifice a young lad whom they had rescued.

On his return, Constans made sure the defences at Cherkley were alert and set off to see what intelligence he could gather. As he descended Juniper Hill he saw flames in the night. These led him, by now on hands and knees, to an open glade. There was a smoking altar at its centre and five men in priestly robes standing around it, including Tarak, the arch-Druid. They were inspecting a victim on

the altar and two priests also went to fetch a golden-haired young girl whose cries broke the night despite her being roughly bound and gagged.

This was Aelgisca. Tarak told her the other victim had failed to provide an augury. Either she became his wife or she would go on the fiery altar. She defiantly chose the fire. Tarak threatened her with a burning brand but she did not flinch.

He ordered her taken to a hut and she shuddered, knowing what he intended to do. She screamed for help at which Constans rushed the surprised Druids and fought them until they fled. He then freed Aelgisca and took her to the safety of the Roman camp.

But a week later the camp was raided and though the attackers were beaten off, Aelgisca and Constans were both missing. The Legion believed she had betrayed him but within hours she returned to say she had followed the attackers and knew where they had taken Constans.

Constans had been knocked unconscious. He awoke in a dark cave - believed to be under a house in Butter Hill in modern Dorking. He was bound to a litter. The Druids decided his death would be by the Scales. He was placed on one pan of a huge scales above a fire. A leaking container of water was put in the other pan so that he would be very, very slowly lowered on to the fire.

But at the last minute his comrades burst in to the rescue. Tarak attacked him with a knife, determined not to be deprived of his death, but Constans had broken free from his weakened bonds and fought him off. Tarak escaped from the cave, though wounded.

SEDGWICK NOTES:

Some years ago a skeleton was excavated on the Downs. Experts showed it to be British and suggested from its frontal development, that it had been a man such as Tarak the Druid....We have other equally good reasons for believing that Constans and Aelgisca were happily married and occupied the new villa which stood near the present Ashtead Church.

While digging in the churchyard, within recent times, parts of a Roman frieze were found, and these bore, besides other designs, the remains of the letters GISC. No antiquary has yet contradicted the

theory that they formed part of Aelgisca's name, perhaps built into the wall at the command of Constans, in loving admiration of his beautiful wife.



Above: A Roman fragment dug up at Ashtead

LEATHERHEAD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY CONTACTS

Registered Charity No 1175119

Hampton Cottage, 64 Church Street, Leatherhead KT22 8DP

Telephone: 01372 386348 Email: museum@leatherheadhistory.org

Website: www.leatherheadhistory.org

President

Alan Pooley president@leatherheadhistory.org

Chairman

John Rowley chairman@leatherheadhistory.org

Treasurer

Carl Leyshon treasurer@leatherheadhistory.org

Membership

Frank Haslam membership@leatherheadhistory.org

Curator
Cathy Brett curator@leatherheadhistory.org

Archaeology
Nigel Bond archaeology@leatherheadhistory.org

Proceedings
David Hawksworth proceedings@leatherheadhistory.org

Newsletter Editor
Tony Matthews newsletter@leatherheadhistory.org

Museum Managers
Peter Humphreys museum@leatherheadhistory.org
Duncan Macfarlane museum@leatherheadhistory.org

FRIENDS OF LEATHERHEAD MUSEUM
(organising Museum volunteers etc)

Chairman
Duncan Macfarlane museum@leatherheadhistory.org

Secretary,
Peter Humphreys museum@leatherheadhistory.org

Treasurer, Friends of Leatherhead Museum
Carl Leyshon treasurer@leatherheadhistory.org



Figurine provided by The Liberty Collection

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