



# *Leatherhead & District Local History Society*



## *Newsletter*      *April 2023*

### *Ashtead Pottery*

*1923 - 1935*

### *Centenary Exhibition*

*Displays, talks & pottery workshops*

*For details visit [www.ashtead.org/pottery100](http://www.ashtead.org/pottery100)*



*11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> April*

*10am - 9pm*

*Free entry, donations welcome*

*St. Giles' Church Dell Centre  
Park Lane KT21 1EJ*



*Covering Ashtead, the Bookhams, Fetcham, Leatherhead*

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**Cover: See report of the forthcoming Ashted Potters Centenary exhibition on Page 8.**

**EDITORIAL**

Welcome to the second *L&DLHS Newsletter* of the year following a number of changes in the operation of the Society. You may notice that the edition is slightly smaller than the standard 40 pages of the last seven years. We now have fewer contributors than in the past, matching the general trend of lower activity since the pandemic with the loss of some key figures as well as lower membership.

On the other hand we now have an exciting new era for the Museum under its recently appointed curator, keen management, and dedicated Friends and stewards. Enormous effort has gone into this winter's programme of cleaning, restoring and enhancing the collections. Some real treats await the new season's visitors to Hampton Cottage from 1 April until next winter.

I am also happy to announce the forthcoming Ashtead Potters Exhibition over three days this month at St Giles Church, Dell Centre, with a full programme of three lectures every day of the event on a range of relevant subjects. This has been some time in planning and thoroughly deserves to attract wide attention from throughout the district. See Page 8 on what is coming.

The Society's own talks programme has also been resumed, using either the traditional face to face live speaker format at the Letherhead Institute or where applicable a Zoom alternative. Both approaches are reported in this edition of the *L&DLHS Newsletter* with several more talks in the months ahead on Page 13.

History never stands still and changes of one kind or another are and always will be happening. Even the past is not entirely permanent as new interpretations and revelations continue to alter available pictures of events, people and places. Proposals for the future of Leatherhead's riverside have brought strong feelings as seen on Page 14 and we have to see how things pan out. Plenty to watch for.

**TONY MATTHEWS**



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Alan Pooley, L&DLHS President since May 2016, has stood down from the post. He was also Museum Manager at the start of his presidency but has gradually reduced his workload while remaining the Society's archivist for Fetcham. We all owe him a huge debt for his work for the Society over many years.



Simon Ritchie gave this month's talk at the Abraham Dixon Hall in the Letherhead Institute about the influence of tea on the British (see Page 22). My own talk on one-time Ashted resident Beverley Nichols which will now take place in September around Heritage Week.

It goes without saying that we urgently need replacements to fill the posts of treasurer, secretary, publications manager and records assistants for Bookham, Fetcham and Leatherhead.

While Duncan MacFarlane has taken on organisation of talks, this is currently only for 2023. Any member who wishes to be involved should contact him directly. The current programme is on Page 13.

Meanwhile do think about how you might make a limited contribution to the L&DLHS. Also consider any friends or acquaintances who may have some spare time for a worthy cause.

I am sorry to report that one of our longstanding local residents, Mrs May (Mary) Chauncy Cree, née Maples, died 5 January aged 101. She had been an honorary member of the Society for the last two years. Her obituary is on Page 31, with a poem read at her funeral.

The pandemic should be well behind us by now but has still played havoc with our routines. Without the usual planned calendar activities happening regularly, the Society's smooth running, with volunteers stepping in at the right time, has been undermined.

Despite everything, the Museum - our own 'Aurora Borealis' - has done brilliantly. My sincere thanks to all of those involved there.

**JOHN ROWLEY**

## MUSEUM MATTERS

### FRIENDS OF LEATHERHEAD MUSEUM

The Museum reopens Saturday, 1 April with an opening ceremony at 10.30 am.

The annual training arrangements for stewards were altered, introducing a choice

of two sessions from 10 am to 12 noon so that many more volunteers could attend. With the threat from Covid now reduced the training was conducted partly inside the building and partly in the garden. The training days were Saturdays 11 and 25 March.

Cathy Brett and her team have been creating a new exhibition in the Hollis Room and re-arranging other rooms to give the Museum a fresh dynamic. Over the winter it has had a thorough clean and generally been refreshed both inside and out, including the courtyard and garden. The Covid controls have been set aside but could be reinstated quickly if necessary.

Last year's John Ainley exhibition proved a big success, attracting new visitors. We are extremely grateful to John's daughter, Liz Wheeler and her family, for creating such a wide-ranging display.

We still need more volunteers, both for stewarding but also for physical work behind the scenes and administration. IT skills would be a help but are not essential. Expertise is priceless. In addition to our display team, we need a small team to manage our collection of documents, artefacts, maps etc in our large stockroom.

Regular support is a big help but it need not be regular to be useful. Come and have a chat if you are curious and if you have a friend or two you think you may be able to persuade too, please do so. Thank you all for your support.

**DUNCAN MACFARLANE and PETER HUMPHREYS**



## MUSEUM NEWS

**From CATHY BRETT, CURATOR**

Since the Museum closed for the winter we have been beavering away behind the scenes, creating new exhibits and refreshing old favourites.

Finding there was more work than anticipated, I put out a call for 'curatorial' volunteers on social media and had a wonderful response. Our new Museum exhibits team now numbers seven and includes some really talented and knowledgeable members, each with a range of specialist skills.

We recruited a volunteer marketing consultant and an expert on book sales, too, and had a visit from our previous curator, Lorraine Spindler. With so much advice and encouragement it's been a great start to our museum refit!



**Cathy Brett**



Our first task was cleaning, which had to be undertaken with great care as we are responsible for some rare and fragile artefacts.

Many enjoyable hours have been spent standing around our conservation cleaning table, getting to grips with everything from rusty cast iron pots to delicate Roman jewellery.



While cleaning and rearranging the displays we were learning about the collection and engaging in further research so we are able to update our labels and add new stories.

We've been visiting other museums for ideas and had the good fortune to be at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire on that really warm day in February. It's very family friendly and well-worth a visit. A tour of the recreated Stone Age and Saxon buildings gave us lots of ideas for our new archaeology timeline gallery.

Our most exciting project is the headline exhibition being installed in the Hollis Room – *Jane Austen's Leatherhead* – but it's only one of six great new rooms to explore this spring. The grand reopening is Saturday 1 April. We can't wait to welcome you back.



## EXHIBITION NEWS

### ASHTEAD POTTERS CENTENARY by LIZ NEWHOUSE

Ashtead Potters Ltd started in the Victoria Works on the main road though Ashtead in April 1923. Its aim was to provide employment for ex-servicemen who had been injured in the First World War.

Very few of the men originally lived in the area so accommodation was provided in the newly built Purcells Close, named after Kathleen Purcell, Lady Weaver. Sir Lawrence and Lady Weaver were instrumental in the creation of the business. Through Sir Lawrence's position as Director General of Exhibits at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924-25, he was able to promote the pottery to a wide audience and demand for the wares grew.

Sadly Lady Weaver died in 1927 and Sir Lawrence in 1930. The loss of the business's chief benefactors and the Great Depression resulted in the closure of the pottery in 1935.

To mark the centenary of the opening of the pottery, an exhibition is being held in St Giles Church's Dell Centre, Ashtead KT21 1EJ. About 250 pieces will be on display, a number of them on loan from Leatherhead Museum.

There will be a series of talks on interesting, related topics as well as pottery workshops, including the opportunity to try throwing a pot on a wheel (£20 for a one hour session, book in advance via the exhibition website).

**Right: Entrance.**



**Sir Lawrence  
Weaver**







**Above: Selection of items from the Centenary Exhibition.  
Below: Staff in 1924.**



The Queen has ordered the first specimen of a new pattern of Toby jugs by a society of disabled ex-Service men known as the Ashtead Potters and bearing a characteristic representation of the Prime Minister, who is shown holding his pipe. Round the rim are facsimile autographs of Mr. Baldwin and the artist who designed the jug.

**Above: From the *Sheffield Telegraph*, 1927.**

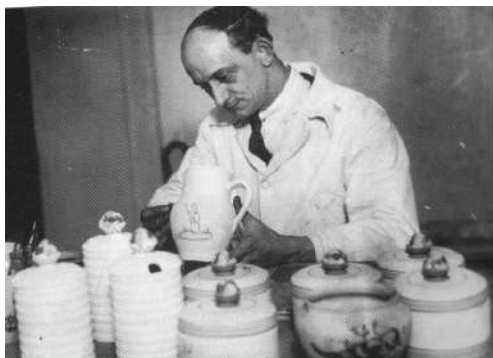
**Right: Stanley Baldwin as a Toby jug.**

**Below right: His predecessor David Lloyd-George was also represented.**

**Bottom left: Potter William Robinson.**

There will also be a display of paintings by the charity Conquest Art and a café serving light refreshments run by the charity ALDAG. Everyone is most welcome to come along.

The exhibition is being planned by a group of Ashtead residents, all keen collectors of Ashtead Pottery. They aim to show how the pottery was set up to provide employment for servicemen disabled,



both mentally and physically, by the war and how it offered an opportunity to be creative, an early and largely successful attempt at therapy through art.

One of the talks by Combat Stress will explain how such therapies continue to be important for our armed forces today. Another talk will be by the professional ceramicist, James Duck. He will be speaking about his work and involvement with the charity Maxability, which supports disabled adults, helping them to develop their creative potential through inclusive ceramics classes. He will also be giving a demonstration of throwing pots on a wheel.

The exhibition will open between 10am and 9pm from Tuesday, 11 April until Thursday, 13 April. Entry is free but donations will be welcome to help cover the costs of the event.



**Left:  
Princess  
Mary,  
Princess  
Royal  
visits the  
Ashtead  
Potters  
stand,  
possibly  
at the  
British  
Empire  
Exhibition  
in  
Wembley.**

The programme of talks for each day is as follows:

**Tuesday, 11 April**

10.30am: Ashtead Pottery's production  
Speaker: John Rowley, L&DLHS

2.30pm: Ashtead's Roman pottery  
Speaker: Dr David Bird, archaeologist

7.30pm: Ashtead Pottery, an introduction  
Speaker: Andy Carter

**Wednesday, 12 April**

10.30am: Notable Ashtead Pottery pieces  
Speaker: Andy Carter

2.30pm: Langley Vale Wood in WW1  
Speaker: The Woodland Trust representative

7.30pm: Art Deco's impact on design  
Speaker: Dr Anne Anderson, art historian

**Thursday, 13 April**

10.30am: Supporting veterans today  
Speaker: Aamir Calloo, Combat Stress

2.30pm: The Pottery's VIP connections  
Speaker: Andy Carter

7.30pm: Talk and Pottery Wheel Demo  
Speaker: James Duck, ceramicist

## SOCIETY NEWS

### PROGRAMME OF LECTURES at the Letherhead Institute

7.30 pm, Friday, 21 April: Cathy Brett and Lucy Quinnell on *Jane Austen's Leatherhead*. This will parallel the new exhibition in the Museum from its reopening on 1 April.

7.30 pm, Friday, 21 May: Ben Gale on *Leatherhead's River Mole Islands*. Topical in view of the proposals for development of the riverside.

7.30 pm, Friday, 16 June: Anne Anderson on *Arts and Crafts houses in Surrey*.

### ANY SOUND ENGINEERS OUT THERE?

The L&DLHS website at [www.leatherheadhistory.org](http://www.leatherheadhistory.org) has open access to the Oral History Archive of interviews conducted with local people as far back as 1979. It is a fascinating window on the past, providing the voices of people from every class and background, many speaking of times a century or more ago when this was very much a rural area with a small number of landowners and a population which largely relied on them for employment or business.

It is some time since we have been able to conduct oral history interviews because we no longer have access to an audio editor with the engineering expertise to match sound to the written texts of interviews carried out by *Newsletter* Editor Tony Matthews. If you can offer such a technical skill or know someone who could, please contact the *Newsletter* Editor to discuss filling this gap.

The Leatherhead district still has many residents with memories covering half of the last century. To preserve some of those memories for younger generations we need to interview the people concerned if they are willing to help, knowing their voices will outlive them for many years to come. There is a world of difference between actually listening to those voices and simply reading their words. We now need the technical knowhow to make that possible.

## SOCIETY NEWS

### WORKSHOP ON RIVER MOLE AT LEATHERHEAD

A workshop on the future of the River Mole at Leatherhead was organised by landscape architects Allen Scott Ltd on 19 January 2023. Among those with innovative and imaginative ideas were Lucy Quinnell of Rowhurst and Cathy Brett of Leatherhead Museum.

The proposed name Riverside Park was rejected as sounding too urban for the setting. Riverside Nature Reserve or Leatherhead Riverside were suggested as preferable for what was primarily an ecology zone rather than a public park.

Also rejected was the idea of a bridge across the islands. Litter, people, pets and foxes would upset ground nesting birds and bring trampling on fauna and flora. It was also in the wrong place. The practical place for a footbridge was near Waterways Bridge.

Already being discussed at the Mole Valley Cycling Forum were several potential options for a new cycle/footpath bridge linked to new cycle ways and footpaths. All current planners needed to be working in tandem and considered at the same time, not separately.

The area under discussion at this workshop was just upstream of Waterways Bridge and south to halfway along the footpath/cycleway from Town Bridge to Thorncroft. This made no sense as the connection to south Leatherhead and Fetcham was vital. Smaller items for improvement such as new benches or bins could hardly stop half way along the footpaths.

Minchin Gardens also needed to be included and made into a more formal garden for residents and visitors to the town to enjoy. It made no strategic sense to restrict the area to just literally near the town.

Lucy and Cathy had carried out fascinating research into the area. They believed that all the river and islands had once been landscaped and probably designed by Lancelot Capability Brown. This was Lucy's university subject and she planned to make it one of the river projects she worked on with local schools as part of the Leatherhead & District Countryside Protection Society 'Running Places' project this year.

Jane Austen had set her novel *Emma* in the local area. Randalls,



**Above and right:  
Two areas of the  
River Mole at  
Leatherhead not  
included in  
current  
thinking.**



Thorncroft Manor, Box Hill and other local places all appeared in the book, some with their real names.

The painter J. M. W. Turner had also visited the area and painted a view of the St Mary and St Nicholas Parish Church. Lucy had tracked this down in Tate Britain and was surprised by how few local people knew that Turner had connections with Leatherhead and had stayed at Norbury Park.

This was a perfect opportunity to capitalise on the rich history and restore some of the historic landscape features as vistas viewable from adjacent river banks while ensuring that the rich ecology was authentically enhanced and not damaged in any way.

## LECTURE REPORT

### OXFORD BETWEEN THE WARS: THE REAL BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

**DAISY DUNN's** family has lived in Fetcham since she was 18. She spent eight years at Oxford and London universities studying classics and acquiring a doctorate. While in Oxford she became fascinated by the classicist academics whose work she was studying and particularly their correspondence, held within the university archives. She wrote her sixth and most recent book there during lockdown. Entitled *Not Far From Brideshead: Oxford Between the Wars*, it was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in March 2022.



**DAISY DUNN**  
(Photo courtesy of Alice Dunn)

The world of interwar Oxford, inspiration for Evelyn Waugh's 1945 novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, was the subject of Dr Daisy Dunn's talk to the L&DLHS on 20 January, first in the new 2023 programme of lectures at the Letherhead Institute.

She opened by describing the novel's popularity during her own student days at Oxford in the mid-2000s and the expectation of many of her peers that they would relive at least part of that world while studying there. But how much of *Brideshead Revisited* was ever based in reality? This was the question Daisy set out to answer.

She quoted Pansy Lamb, a debutante at Oxford in 1922, who later



said she was not nostalgic for the 1920s, recalling Oxford as 'prosperous, bourgeois and practical', without glamour. Yet Evelyn Waugh portrayed it in a very different light. Who was more right?

Waugh studied at Hertford College in the same year, 1922. Daisy described his enthusiasm for student societies including the Hypocrites Club and the Railway Club. It was a time of 'Oxford bags' where male students often wore especially baggy trousers. The Bullingdon Club was notorious for the bad behaviour of extremely wealthy students - she mentioned the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VIII - who would vandalise property and then pay for the damage without a thought. The behaviour of some of Waugh's friends clearly inspired that of some of his characters. Harold Acton, for example, read poetry aloud through a megaphone from the windows of Christ Church. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Anthony Blanche does the same.

In the novel, Sebastian Flyte carries around a teddy bear called Aloysius. The inspiration for this, said Daisy, was almost certainly John Betjeman, the future poet laureate, who carried his own bear, Archie, around Oxford as a student in the 1920s. She described how irritating Betjeman's limited work ethic could be to his tutor, a young C. S. Lewis.

She also described how, despite the students' jubilation and hi-jinks, including a fashion for serving shellfish out of bathtubs, a shadow hung over Oxford after the First World War and continued to linger through to the Second. Many students feared returning to uniform. Vera Brittain captured the anxiety of the age particularly well in her memoir, *A Testament of Youth*. Daisy referred to a 'profound inferiority complex' among some younger students who had not served during the war and behaved badly as if to compensate in some way. They were constantly being told that their predecessors at the university had been better than them.

Daisy mentioned the extraordinary impact of the debate at Oxford in 1933 entitled 'This house would not fight for King and Country'. The vote favoured the motion by 225 to 153 and Winston Churchill afterwards blamed this for Britain's decadent reputation in hostile countries like Germany and the Soviet Union. The earlier General Strike of 1926 too had influenced the country's wider reputation.

*'An amazing book, elegantly erudite'* **Antonia Fraser**

DAISY DUNN  
**NOT FAR  
FROM  
BRIDESHEAD**

Oxford Between the Wars



**Cover designed by Amanda Short**

However, Waugh separated the arcadian side and dream world from the reality remembered by Pansy Lamb. He referred to 'something baroque and magnificent' about Oxford. But the world of his novel, Daisy argued, was an elaboration of the short window of light that poured in during the early 1920s.

It was only in 1920 itself that women were first able to receive degrees from the university. The writer Dorothy L Sayers was among those who benefited. There had been female students at Oxford since the 1870s but they were denied degrees. This change in 1920 presented a major development and contrasted with Cambridge where women had to wait another 28 years for their degrees. However, Oxford's brief progress was marred by the introduction of a quota on the number of women allowed to study at the university from 1927. Only one in seven students were to be female. The quota stayed in place for no less than 31 years until 1958.

Daisy told amusing anecdotes about some women's experiences. These included the time they were relocated to Oriel, an all-male college, during the First World War, and barricaded into a separate quadrangle so they would not be a temptation for the male students!

However, many of these women were supported in their studies by forward thinking professors. Daisy introduced three such characters, the protagonists of her book and of real interwar Oxford, namely Gilbert Murray, E. R. Dodds and Maurice Bowra. Each was a great personality in his time.

Gilbert Murray, an Australian-born titan of classical scholarship, married into the family that inhabited Castle Howard in North Yorkshire. He and his wife Lady Mary lived for a time at Barford Court in Churt. They were friends with Virginia Woolf, who recorded that Gilbert Murray was so pure of heart and mind that he appeared to have been polished with a pumice stone. He was a strict vegetarian and a telepathic thought-reader. Apparently, the famous escapologist Harry Houdini was so rattled by Murray's alleged skill that he attempted to emulate his thought-reading experiments.

E. R. Dodds was an Irish philosopher and little-known influence behind leading poets of the age, including W. H. Auden, W. B. Yeats and Louis MacNeice. He was MacNeice's literary executor. At Oxford he dabbled in hypnotism and séances and remained

fascinated by the paranormal throughout his life. He entered his dogs at shows in Birmingham while a lecturer there and had a pet parrot named William.

Maurice Bowra was the key inspiration for the character of Mr Samgrass in *Brideshead Revisited*. Mr Samgrass is the rather stuffy academic sent to keep an eye on Sebastian Flyte when he descends into alcoholism. Bowra was a much more appealing character. In his obituary of 1971, *The Times* described him as ‘the most remarkable figure of his time in the university’.

Bowra studied at Oxford from 1919 after serving on the Western Front and became an academic at Wadham College for the rest of his life. He was famous for his wit. He liked to boast of giving people ‘the warm shoulder’ or having a ‘long and interesting silence’ with people who could not speak English. John Betjeman and Kenneth Clark, of TV’s *Civilisation* fame, both credited Bowra with being a great influence in their lives. It was a very different era and Daisy suggested that Bowra’s homosexuality may have held him back in his career owing to attitudes of the time.

The world of Oxford between the wars might have been a little different from that Waugh created in his novel but it was no less interesting – maybe much more so.

## ZOOM REPORT

### GEOFF BARKWAY ON THAT BRIDGE



In February, L&DLHS members were invited to watch on Zoom a recorded talk by Geoff Barkway (1921-2006) (shown left), a World War 2 glider pilot hero who lived in Bookham for 45 years and belonged to many local organisations including the L&DLHS itself.

The recording was made in 2004 at the 21st International Churchill Conference in Portsmouth. Geoff spoke of both his training and the attack itself on the Pegasus Bridge in Normandy on D-Day.

L&DLHS chairman John Rowley obtained permission from the Ministry of Defence for the recording to be played, with an introduction by Bill Whitman who knew Geoff as a fellow member of ARMADA PROBUS.

Staff Sergeant Barkway was one of six glider pilots who landed British commandos at the Pegasus Bridge in Normandy in the early hours of 6 June 1944 as part of the Allied invasion of Nazi occupied France. Although the Germans had planned to destroy the bridge, the commandos secured it and helped to ensure the invasion's success.

Geoff piloted the third Horsa glider to land at the bridge. The two previous gliders occupied much of the landing area and he had to swerve to avoid one of them. This caused him to rotate 90 degrees to the right and his glider broke in half with its nose landing in a pond. Geoff was catapulted out, briefly losing consciousness, but he returned to the aircraft and released some entangled passengers.

Shortly afterwards he was unloading ammunition when he was shot in the right arm. He was taken back to hospital in Portsmouth where gangrene set in and the arm was amputated.

Unlike his five fellow glider pilots he received no medal for his D-Day achievement. He did not talk about this but it must have hurt. In fact it was traced to a War Office mix-up. The medal was gazetted but went to another Barkway! Fortunately Geoff did eventually receive the Distinguished Flying Medal, the award given to personnel without officer commissions. However an RAF Air Marshall described his experience as 'one of the most skilful feats of flying in the whole war'.

He was invalided from the Army in 1945 and later obtained an engineering degree at Kingston Technical College, leading to a long career with London Transport. After retiring in 1981, he became a consultant on underground transport systems in both New York and Singapore.

Bill Whitman said: 'I remember towards the end of his life, Geoff came with us on a visit to Dover. He was in a wheel-chair but he had to leave that to walk, with our help, through the underground hospital.

'When I heard that he had died I rang the obituaries section of *The Daily Telegraph*. As I suspected, they had not heard so I suggested

they contact the Glider Pilots' Association and mention Pegasus Bridge. Geoff got his full-page obituary and a military presence at his funeral. He was a brave but modest man. I am proud to have been his friend.'

His funeral in 2006 took place at the Church of the Holy Spirit, Fetcham, and then at Randalls Park Crematorium, Leatherhead.

An earlier report on Geoff Barkway by Bill Whitman appeared on Page 14 of the *L&DLHS Newsletter* in December 2019.

## LECTURE REPORT

### HOW THE BRITISH FELL IN LOVE WITH TEA by SIMON RITCHIE

Tea is made from the leaves of a camellia. The Chinese have made it for thousands of years but turning camellia flowers into tea involves a long and complicated labour-intensive process.

The topmost couple of leaves of the plant (the 'tips') are plucked while still young, before they turn dark and leathery. A tea bush yields suitable tips in a series of 'flushes' once every ten days for a few months each year. An expert tea picker can pick about 10 lbs (four kilos) of leaves per day.

Once picked, the leaves are dried in the sun, fried in a wok and rolled on a table to bring out the essential oils. After processing, those four kilos are reduced to about a single kilo of tea. At the time of writing, Sainsbury's was selling a box of 160 *Gold Label* tea bags for £3.60. At two grams of tea per bag, that represents a picker working for a third of a day.

Large fragments of leaf brew slowly but produce the best result. The next best are the smaller fragments that you see in a packet of loose-leaf tea from a supermarket. The lowest grade is the remaining powder known in the trade as 'dust'. Tea dust brews quickly and so is used in tea bags, leading to the urban myth that tea bags contain the 'sweepings from the factory floor'.

In the 17th century, Chinese peasant families all over the country each had a small garden producing tea for their own consumption. The quality varied according to growing conditions. The best tea was grown on high misty mountain slopes in well-drained stony



**Above: Chinese tea carrier.**

soil. Some areas were best for producing leaves for black tea, others for green.

Tea from China was first brought to Europe by Dutch traders in the early 17th century. The ships carried tea and silk, both luxury products. Tea first appeared in coffee houses as a novelty.

To compensate for the light weight of the cargo, porcelain pots were added as ballast. That was handy because European earthenware pottery was not robust enough to brew tea, which needs hotter water than coffee. So Chinese porcelain and tea both became fashionable in Europe.

Samuel Pepys is claimed to have written the first recorded mention of tea in English in 1660..... ‘and afterwards I did send for a cup of tee (*sic*) (a China drink) of which I had never drank before.’

King Charles II’s wife Catherine of Braganza popularised tea in England but it was an expensive habit for the super-rich. It was

stored in a special box with two compartments, one for green tea the other for black, and blended by the lady of the house. The box was locked to prevent the servants from stealing the tea.

As tea became a little less expensive, drinking it spread across the upwardly mobile classes of Britain and its empire but it was too expensive for the lower orders. British tea drinkers tended to find robust black tea more palatable than green, adding milk and then West Indian sugar to counteract the bitter taste.

The British East India Company produced all sorts of plant-based products including large amounts of opium intended for sale to the vast Chinese market. When the Chinese imperial government resisted this abuse of its population, the Royal Navy fought the first Opium War in 1839 to break the embargo. The resulting crisis destabilised both the Chinese economy and the imperial government but it led to a useful result for the East India Company.

It was able to swap opium for tea at an advantageous rate of exchange and send the tea back to Britain. This reduced the cost at home and the market expanded. At the height of the trade, the British bought 20% of China's tea production while import duty on tea yielded 10% of Britain's tax income.

The general population was not yet addicted to tea but the government certainly was, as well as to the drug-pushing that enabled the trade to exist.

The end of the first Opium War in 1842 also opened up China to intrepid British visitors. The Royal Horticultural Society promptly sent an expedition led by Robert Fortune (1812-1880), a Scottish botanist and plant hunter, whose trip involved bringing back commercial crop plants such as the kumquat (*Citrus fortunei*) and exotics such as the double yellow rose (Fortune's Double Yellow), the white wisteria and the corsage gardenia that became garden favourites in Europe.

Fortune's book *Three Year's Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China* became a best-seller. He also settled part of the mystery of tea, discovering that black tea and green tea were produced from the same plant, *Camellia Sinensis*. While terrains varied in terms of production, the essential difference was in the processing.

The British suspected the Chinese of planning to start growing





**Above: Robert Fortune  
(1812-1880)**

and making their own opium to break the East India Company's monopoly. Meanwhile, Europeans had already discovered how to make porcelain and the Chinese suspected they would also start to grow their own tea. Both suspicions were correct.

*Camellia Sinensis* already grew in the Assam province of India and the East India Company enticed a few Chinese tea-makers to run tea gardens there. However the results were not good and the best quality plants were still in mountainous areas of China, hundreds of miles from seaports such as Shanghai.

To create a viable tea industry in India quickly, the East India Company needed 30,000 high-quality plants suitable for green tea, plus a few thousand seeds and the same again for black tea. It also needed to steal the secrets of tea-processing - a dangerous mission as the Chinese authorities would execute anybody they found trying to do it. Moreover the Chinese Empire was in the early stages of its eventual breakdown and any foreigner with money was always in danger of kidnap and murder by bandits.

Robert Fortune was the obvious man for the mission so he was made an offer he couldn't refuse. If he survived the trip and was successful, he would be paid a handsome fee. He would also own the rights to any other plants he collected while the East India Company would pay for the transportation involved.

In 1848 he arrived in the British trade concession area of Shanghai. He was accompanied by two Chinese, one described simply as 'Wang' who acted as translator and fixer, and an unnamed labourer who carried the collecting equipment and the plants. He was just known as 'the Coolie'.

Although Fortune spoke some Chinese, he faced many unfamiliar dialects and needed a translator. His size and facial shape marked him out but he dressed in Chinese clothes and pretended to be a mandarin from a distant province where the people were reputed to be very tall. The locals had never seen foreigners of any kind, so the trick worked.

The team headed for Wang's home territory which was good green tea country. Despite Fortune stopping every few hundred yards to dig up a newly-discovered plant for his own collection, five months later they were back in Shanghai with the required tea

plants, seeds and knowledge to kick-start a green tea industry in India.

Fortune found out the complex process of turning leaves into green tea through a cunning plan – he walked into a tea factory and asked how it was done! He also discovered that the tea for the European trade was dyed to keep it nice and green on its long sea voyage. The manufacturers used a blue and a yellow pigment, both poisonous. (Blue printing ink is called Cyan because it used to contain cyanide.)

Before the railways, transporting plants across thousands of miles of ocean had been extremely challenging (although it was done with breadfruit in the Pacific islands). However new Wardian cases made it more feasible. Wikipedia says: ‘The Wardian case was the direct forerunner of the modern terrarium and vivarium and the inspiration for the glass aquarium. It was named after Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward (1791–1868) of London, who promoted the case after experiments.’

A Wardian case was an airtight glass and metal box containing soil, some plants and a tiny amount of water, providing a closed ecosystem. The glass let in sunlight and a plant could survive in there indefinitely as long as the seal was not breached. On the deck of a ship, the case also kept out the salty air.

Fortune had Wardian cases made up and dispatched the plants and seeds to Calcutta, dividing the cargo across four ships for safety. The whole consignment arrived intact a few months later and was shipped along the Ganges and by ox-cart to the mountains of Assam.

Unfortunately the East India Company bureaucracy could be relied on to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Cases were broken on the journey and, against all instructions, the rest were opened to check the plants and then given a good watering before being sealed up again and sent on.

Only a few plants survived and the botanist who received them provided the wrong growing conditions and killed them. The tea seeds didn’t survive the trip either, so as far as the East India Company was concerned, Fortune’s first journey was an expensive washout.

The man himself was happier. He had the plants he had collected for his own benefit and would make good money out of them once he got back home. However there would have to be another expedition

to green tea country.

His next expedition was to black tea country with another fixer called Sing Hoo. Once again they collected tea plants and seeds of the best quality and stole the manufacturing process for black tea. (Similar to green tea but some stages were carried out for longer.) Meanwhile Wang was sent back home to collect more seeds for green tea production.

Fortune sent the results to India but this time he put the seeds into Wardian cases as well as the plants so they germinated on the journey and survived. On his advice the haul was planted in the Calcutta Botanic Garden and only the off-springs were sent to the mountain tea gardens. He also recruited more Chinese botanists to run the operation.

So began the industrial production of tea in Assam and Darjeeling. Looking back, the whole plan looks pretty unlikely. Send a plant-hunter into a dangerous and hostile country to collect thousands of best-quality tea plants and steal the secret processes that made them valuable. How did it succeed at all?

It was partly because Fortune had pretended to be a mandarin. Most Chinese people were very respectful of authority and if a government official turned up at your tea plantation wanting a few tea plants and asking all sorts of questions about what to do with them you would be happy to oblige. The other members of Fortune's team would also have known the areas they visited and managed to keep him out of trouble. They knew that if he got himself killed, they would very likely be next, so they probably guided him away from danger.

Fortune also hid in plain sight. Apart from tea, the plants he collected were indigenous and would have been regarded as no more than weeds. When the Chinese saw a well-dressed man of the upper classes digging up weeds and writing notes on them, they may have thought he was just insane and ignored him.

Wardian cases were vital to the operation, along with the techniques that Fortune developed to use them. Other plant hunters picked them up, leading to an explosion in the availability of exotic species in Europe and producing the huge range of garden plants that we know today.

Robert Fortune went plant hunting all over the world and made a good living selling the results to gardeners. His later trips to Brazil were particularly profitable. He died in 1880 leaving over £40,000 to his wife and six children – millions in today’s money.

As the Indian tea gardens became established, Indian tea became steadily cheaper and eventually people of every class could drink it, leading to the mass market tea industries of Assam and Darjeeling that we know today. Tea was also cultivated in other parts of the British Empire, in Africa and notably in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). It became the respectable alternative to alcoholic drinks.

The British also picked up the Indian habit of ‘tiffin’, a light meal in the middle of the afternoon. In India, tiffin involves spicy finger food such as samosas. The English version became sandwiches, cakes and, of course, tea. The word tiffin survives here as a chocolate biscuit.

Fortune also gave us the recipe that we use to make tea. Warm the pot and add a teaspoonful of dry tea per cup. Use freshly drawn water (boiling water repeatedly removes the oxygen as needed for the brewing process). Bring the water just to the boil but not to a rolling boil. Bring the pot to the kettle (to keep the water hot), not the kettle to the pot and pour the water over the tea. Brew for a time depending on the grade (dust brews quickly, large leaf tea takes a few minutes). Relax and enjoy your tea.

The Chinese make their tea directly in the cup. We use teapots and add an extra spoonful of tea ‘for the pot’. We add milk and sugar. Some people use mugs, not cups and saucers, and put the milk in first. Some say this is because they are using cheap pottery that would break if hot tea was poured straight on to it. Milk in last could be seen as a sign that you can afford proper china crockery.

That changed in the early 1960s when nicely decorated china mugs appeared, making them somewhat more respectable. In the 1970s, British Rail experimented with tea dust glued to the bottom of a paper cup in its buffet carriages. Pouring in hot water melted the glue and released the tea leaves.

About the same time, the writer Douglas Adams (he wrote *The Hitchhikers’ Guide to the Galaxy*) described a machine-made drink that was ‘almost, but not quite, entirely unlike tea’.



**Above: Christopher Robin tea set produced by Ashted Potters.**

Here in Leatherhead we especially celebrate the Goblin Teasmade (see picture on Page 6), a combination of an alarm clock and automatic tea-maker patented in 1933 and manufactured at the old Goblin works in Ermyn Way (the Exxon site). You set it up the night before by putting dry tea into the pot and water in the kettle.

In the morning, the kettle started up and the steam forced the boiling water into the teapot, so you were woken up with a nice cup of tea ready at your bedside. The Goblin Works operated 1938-1984. Leatherhead Museum has a range of Teasmades and other Goblin products. Swan acquired the trademark and now sells retro versions manufactured in China.

In India they make chai. They add spices to black tea and brew it for a few minutes in a pan using a mixture of milk, water and sugar at a rolling boil, producing a strong sweet result which works well in hot weather. In the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the main character gets a job as a 'chai wallah' bringing regular doses of chai to call centre workers.

In North Africa they serve mint tea, one version of which is actually Indian black tea (often a Lipton's *Yellow Label* teabag) with a sprig of mint, served without milk.

The Tregothnan Estate in Cornwall has grown camellias for centuries. They host some of the national collections. A few years ago the owner went to Darjeeling, decided that the landscape at

home was similar and brought back some tea bushes. Since 2005 the estate has produced a small crop of high quality, very expensive tea. You can buy Tregothnan Tea by mail order.

My favourite online tea store is High Teas: <https://highteas.co.uk/>. If you can afford it, I recommend their Bukhial single estate tea.

Drury also sells tea online but aims at commercial customers and has an extra charge for small orders: <https://www.shopdrury.com/> If you happen to be in London, the company has a shop in New Row near Leicester Square.

## OBITUARY

### MAY CHAUNCEY CREE (1921-2023)

May Cree was born and lived on and off at Murrays Court in Agates Lane, Ashted for more than 100 years. Her grandfather had bought the house and farm in 1898 so the family spanned three centuries there.

May arrived 24 September 1921. Her father was a solicitor in London, her mother came from a British colonial family in Sri Lanka.

Murrays Court and its barn were built c1640. It still covered 14 acres down to the Rye Brook when she was born but most of the land was later sold off for development.

Smiler Marshall, a World War One veteran who would become Britain's last surviving cavalryman from that conflict, came to work there in 1940. He ran the farm, looked after the ponies and other livestock, and grew potatoes there during the war.

He lived to be 108 and had his 100th birthday in 1997 at Murrays Court, drawing TV cameras. He had earlier acted as escort aged 90



when May's daughter Davinia married in 1987, holding up the traffic in Ashted so that her horse and carriage could turn round. He had a fine singing voice and when they went with the British Legion to a centenary event at Rochester Cathedral, he got a standing ovation from 2000 people after singing songs from World War One.

May went to school at Parsons Mead in Ottways Lane. She went on to the Epsom Art School and then the Architectural Association in Bedford Square, London. She joined the firm Halfhide & Partners, working there for six years, the team's only female architect.

In 1955 she married architect David Cree whose firm DNL Cree & Partners was in Leatherhead. He died suddenly of leukaemia in 1961 at just 34 when she was pregnant with Davinia.

She was rescued by another local architect, Peter Stiles, and they went into business together for 20 years while May also brought up her daughter, assisted by her mother and au pairs.

Davinia became a teacher at Downsend School and May designed her house in Little Bookham. She also designed her own sister's house in Oxfordshire and the garden at The Clock House at Byfleet. One of her first jobs was the art room of Parsons Mead and she later worked on alterations including a new laboratory block.

In 1981 she joined the Domestic Building Research Group which documented the historic architecture of cottages and farms. But not all of her projects were successful. She worked with a housekeeper who had been left just enough money to build a cottage. They economised on the fence as the woman's small Pekinese could not jump high. Unfortunately they hadn't realised the neighbour had a large Airedale....

May died 5 January 2023 aged 101. Her funeral was on 20 January. You can hear May talking about her life in the Oral History Archive on the Society website at [www.leatherheadhistory.org](http://www.leatherheadhistory.org)



## A POEM BY LEE SULLIVAN

*May isn't a month that falls in the spring  
May isn't expectation of something they may bring  
May isn't a word to be used after please  
May is much more, than mayfly or may we  
May is a lady, the brightest of all  
May is so elegant. May is queen of the ball  
May is a butterfly that thrives in the sun  
May who's been smiling since 1921  
May is the sunshine that brightens my day  
May is one bright star in our Milky Way  
May who has travelled to lands far and wide  
May has a dog always by her side  
May with such knowledge and all that May has seen  
May who's known reign of 3 Kings and a Queen  
May who loves poetry Wordsworth and Yeats  
May also loves ice-cream and big sticky cakes  
May loves her garden and would sit out there for hours  
May loves all wildlife, if it's not eating her flowers  
May is the architect that saved buildings from ruin  
May who drives passion into all May is doing  
May getting frail now, she doesn't understand  
I won't let you fall May, if you just take my hand  
May's final smile is her widest of all  
May who loves David now hears his call  
They're to be reunited after 61 years  
May's broken heart will be mended  
No more pain, no more tears  
So, with her lipstick applied and in a bright floral dress  
Prepared by her angels Nicole, Kyra and Jess  
Ready to leave now free spirit, your Earth life is done  
Go now spread new light become a star near the sun  
And although we will miss you all of us left behind  
We will all feel your warmth from the sun when it shines  
So go in peace on your journey this the last you are taking  
May's greatest journey 100 years in the making.*

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**SPECIAL APPEAL FROM THE MUSEUM**

**DONALD CAMPBELL MEMORABILIA**



As many people know, world water and land speed record holder Donald Campbell (1921-1967) was one of Leatherhead's most famous residents. He lived at Priors Ford on Gimcrack Hill, a large house since replaced by the flats of Campbell Court.

That was where he planned his record breaking attempt to exceed 300 kph on Coniston Water, Cumbria, in 1967. He had earlier broken no fewer than eight world records and remains the only person to set both land and water records in a single year, 1964. You can hear and read all about him from the 1981 interview with his daughter Gina in the Oral History Archive on the L&DLHS website.

Now the Museum managers are appealing for memorabilia linked with Campbell for display at Hampton Cottage. There are only a few items there at present and they would like to expand this as part of the Museum's enhanced collection of Leatherhead historical material. If you can help, please contact Peter Humphreys or Duncan Macfarlane at the contact address above.



Figurine provided by The Liberty Collection

# HISTORY *LIVES* HERE

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