

THE COCKPIT

A Publication of the Chislehurst Society (Founded 1934)

The Cockpit, on Chislehurst Common, has been the traditional meeting place for Chislehurst people on all great occasions from time immemorial

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EDITORIAL NOTES

We regret that some errors crept into the Autumn 1999 edition of *Cockpit*, and it seems worthwhile to correct them.

On page 2 'Rose Cottage' article, left-hand column: Doris Watson paid her first visit since 1916, not 1926. Lower down, same column: the Heavy Rescue team included Ted Warner, not Tad Warmer. Same page, same article, right-hand column, last sentence: it was during the 1970s that the building was recognised as having special historic interest.

On page 5, Bell ringing article, right-hand column: Carroll Levis, not Lewis.

On page 7, Vehicle Assessment Centre article, left-hand column: Oakwood was built in 1876, not 1836.

We apologise to the writers of these articles.

With reference to the article on 'Blackney the Blacksmith', and the legend of Longfellow getting his inspiration from a visit to Chislehurst, we were amused, when attending a talk about old St Mary Cray recently, to hear that the poet also visited that village, and was enchanted by the sight of the village smithy under the chestnut tree there. How many other English villages also claim a similar visit from Longfellow? A touch of poetic licence, perhaps.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Summer Supper and Social

The next social will be held once again at Camden Place, on 21 July. Ken Palmer and Jan Hendey from the Petts Wood and Hawkwood committee of the National Trust will be the speakers.

Readers are advised to act swiftly to be sure of their tickets, as these events are very popular. The price is £13, which includes an excellent cold buffet. Telephone Sue Thorogood on 8467 2411, or Brenda Calver on 8467 2510.

Carnival and Fun Day

On Saturday 17 June there will be a Millennium Carnival and Fun Day, including a traditional fair. The Carnival will start in Centre Common Road, and go via the High Street to Red Hill School. The Fun Day and fair will be held in Walden Recreation Ground, and the Chislehurst Society will be there; so please come and see us! Both events begin at 11am.

Road Stewards Meeting

The next one will take place on Saturday 1st July, at 10.30am in the Pop-In Parlour.

Book of Chislehurst Memories

This is one of many Millennium activities. Many contributions have already been made, both written and oral, but more would be welcome. Memories do not have to be your life story; quite brief episodes that you remember vividly are welcome. Age and long residence in Chislehurst are not essential qualifications; the 1970s already seem very far back in time. All that is required is for the memory to be Chislehurst-related in some way. Do not worry if you feel unable to write well; the secret is to write in the same way that you talk to others, which gives your memories an authentic 'voice'. The editor can make any necessary adjustments. So please think about it, young and old; have a go, and send the results to Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library.

Heritage Open Days

It is hoped that many buildings that were opened in September 1996 will again be open, in the London Open House weekend, 23 and 24 September 2000. Further announcements and details will be widely available later this summer.

ENQUIRIES RECEIVED

The response to our enquiry about the Vehicle Assessment Centre at Oakwood House encourages us to present another enquiry, in the hope that some readers

will have information to impart.

The subject is the school called Coed Bel, that was located in Lubbock Road. Information about the school, and the Amos sisters who ran it, and the related Fox family is wanted by a lady in County Durham. The Rev. Joseph Hamilton Fox, the Rector of Penshaw parish in that county, was buried in the Annunciation Churchyard, Chislehurst, 8 October 1884. Some of his children were being taught at the school; the Amoses were his sisters-in-law. Some information has already been supplied, including copies of photographs of the school. It was demolished some time ago, but Willow Lodge, Lubbock Road, that was the sanatorium for the school, still survives. Please send any information to the Editor, *The Cockpit*, PO Box 82, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5TT, or to Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library, Red Hill, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 6AD.

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDING OF BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS

There are currently two major country-wide projects in hand that are designed to record listed buildings and public monuments and sculpture.

The Images of England project stems from the National Monuments Record, the public archive of English Heritage. Aided by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, over 500 volunteers from the Royal Photographic Society will be photographing, from publicly accessible land, a 'defining image' of the exterior of every listed building in the country. This includes red telephone boxes, old post boxes, milestones, and a variety of other structures. These images will be included in a web-site, linked to existing publicly available information about the buildings, to form a unique picture of our built heritage. This will be of great value to historians, conservationists, teachers and lecturers. The target date for completion is 2002.

The National Recording Project of the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA), aims to record and photograph all public monuments, sculpture, and three-dimensional public works of art in the country. The end product will be a national database of sites, containing information and pictures of every one recorded. This will be available on the Internet, and on a CD-ROM, and regional catalogues will also be printed. A similar timescale applies to this project.

Much of this work has already been done locally, but you may see photographers at work during this year. Anyone officially involved in either project will be able to explain their task in more detail.

There are some fifty officially listed buildings in Chislehurst; and examples of monuments would include the Janson Memorial fountain in Church Row, the Prince Imperial Monument, which is also a listed item, the Willett Memorial, and Lord Camden's arms on the

facade of Camden Place. All owners and occupiers of listed buildings have already been contacted about the Images project.

RECENT PROGRESS AT SCADBURY

As an account of the recent archaeological work at the Scadbury moated manor house ruins appeared in *Cockpit* as recently as the Autumn 1999 issue, there is not quite so much fresh news as usual. The writer must apologise for being responsible for this situation by missing the deadline for last year's article, resulting in the later Autumn contribution which included some of the 1999 work.

Most activity has been on the short avenue or path which runs from the ruined arch to the bridge abutment at the moatside. In the photograph of the arch in Webb, Miller and Beckwith (opposite page 138) the path runs unseen under the Victorian path leading from the arch towards the right. Excavation showed its construction to be as follows. On a base course of large roughly knapped flint nodules, there is a thick layer of small flint pebbles. On this there lies the walking surface, consisting of closely fitted rounded flint pebbles divided into patterned areas by small hard yellowish bricks. The pathway is edged with red bricks. The cambered surface is badly damaged along its central line, but well preserved nearer to the edges.

It would be of considerable interest to know when this avenue was constructed, as one wonders whether Queen Elizabeth when visiting in 1597, or any of the Walsinghams, or Marlowe, walked upon this surface. The brick arch itself is stylistically probably nearer 1500 than 1600, but is archaeologically undated as yet. According to Miller, page 285, an old man named Dean remembered seeing a date stone of 1540 (which would stylistically be a very reasonable date) on the arch before its 19th century restoration. Stratigraphically, the avenue itself must be later than this; one reason is that its edges are fitted to the arch pillars. How much later (a week or so, or very many years) is uncertain.

Unfortunately, we did not find any dateable material (potsherds, coins etc) well stratified within the path materials. The problem is that because the avenue is of historic interest, it is desirable to preserve the intact areas from excavation, which is necessarily destructive. Hence we could not remove the pebble layer (the most likely to contain finds) where it remained covered by intact decorative surface. Those few stoneware sherds which we did find, lay in disturbed areas, and possibly related to later repairs, and not to the process of construction.

Could any information be obtained from the materials of which the path is constructed? Obviously not from the flints and pebbles. The red edging bricks appear to be of around 1600 (it is not possible to date ordinary red bricks very accurately between about 1450 and

1650), but some of the hidden lower part-bricks appear earlier (re-used?). How about the rather specialised yellow paving bricks? We submitted a sample yellow paving brick to a specialist at the Museum of London. He said it was a Dutch brick, with its main period of import in the early to mid 17th century, but he could not exclude an earlier date. All in all, at present it seems most probable that the avenue was among the £800 worth of 'repairs and alterations' mentioned in a surviving valuation as being put in hand by Sir Richard Bettenson after he bought the estate in 1655. So the Queen and her famous contemporaries probably did not walk upon that particular surface, though as it forms the main entrance, they would have followed the line of the path.

All these details, which one hopes are not too tedious, show the difficulties which sometimes face archaeologists when they seek to date a construction.

As this article is being written, contractors brought in by the Borough are clearing accumulated silt, decayed vegetation and rampant reeds from the west arm of the moat. This has been advocated by ODAS for many years; large machinery is required. It is expected that the operation will lead to a better circulation of water in the moat, although there will never be a good throughput as the supply is only by seepage from the rising ground to the west, and the causeway to the north prevents flow in that part. The moat was formerly neglected and remained largely dried out as shown, for example, in the Ordnance Survey large-scale maps of 1843 onwards. However, around 1930, Hugh Marsham-Townsend had it cleaned out at least partially and replaced some moat brickwork and the missing bridge. It is to be hoped that the current work will lead to a healthier moat which is more beneficial to wildlife, with less blanket-weed. At present, newts including the Great Crested, frogs and toads, moorhen and mallard, sometimes the inevitable Canada goose, and occasionally a heron are all present, but are confined mainly to the deeper eastern and northern arms. A few small fish lurk in the dark water, probably rudd or roach.

The winter, before Christmas, was passed in doing some much needed clearing and tidying work on the island, but afterwards we moved inside the walled garden. This area used to be enclosed by a Tudor brick wall, probably contemporary with the brick arch mentioned above, which adjoins the garden. The southern and eastern sides of the wall have long been demolished, and we are excavating narrow test areas across their probable line to find the footings and establish its position. A long-buried pathway, probably Victorian, has been found just inside the walls, and it is being cleared and perhaps brought back into use.

With the approach of the coming summer weather, kinder to archaeologists, we are looking forward to further interesting discoveries.

Alan Hart (Orpington and District Archaeological Society)

ODAS will be opening the Scadbury site to the public again this September on Saturday 16 and Sunday 17, in the afternoon.

THE MYSTERY OF CHISLEHURST CAVES

Everyone who visits the caves is told the story of the Romans, Saxons and Druids, and how they worked these dark subterranean passages hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago. What is even more extraordinary than the story itself is how it came to be so well known in the absence of any supporting evidence. It is quite likely that chalk was quarried here in Roman times on the north bank of the Kyd Brook (the site of the present car park) but the mines themselves are certainly of much later origin.

All the evidence points to this story being a clever marketing exercise devised by Mrs Annie Ryan, a 55 year old wealthy Lancashire widow and Mr William James Nichols, a local resident and keen amateur archaeologist. How and when they came to meet we do not know, but by 1903 Mrs Ryan's eldest son, Herbert, had been installed as licensee of the Bickley Arms Hotel (now renamed 'Ye Old Stationmaster'). A few months later, Mr Nichols presented the only paper he ever gave to the British Archaeological Association during his forty years membership! In it he claimed that the three Chislehurst mines were respectively the work of Romans, Saxons and Druids.

The theory was immediately disputed and became the subject of controversy in the national press, whilst posters appeared on railway stations both here and abroad advertising the caves as an underground Stonehenge. Oscar Hardee, a prominent local photographer, was quick to publish a set of ten postcards, but as he did not use the captions Roman, Saxon and Druid, they were soon replaced. As a result of all this publicity visitors flocked to Chislehurst. By 1905 the original tiny entrance had been widened, electric light installed, the grounds landscaped and the hotel completely renovated at a cost of £13,000 - an enormous sum at the time.

Later the same year, advertising suddenly ceased, and in July 1906 the licence was transferred to a Mr Alfred John Cope. It appears that Mr Ryan had failed to keep up his mortgage payments and bailiffs had repossessed the hotel after a four hour siege involving his mother and two brothers who finally fled after wrecking the premises, Herbert Ryan himself was not present, for by his own admission, he was then scarcely responsible for his actions and could not recall how he came to sign a document written by Mr Cope agreeing to transfer.

Later postcards show the caves being managed by Mr George Field who ran a carriage hire business from the

hotel stables. Possibly he was the freeholder of the hotel and took advantage of Mr Ryan's unexplained illness to gain control of his successful tourist attraction. Why the local builder, William Lowe, did not come to the rescue is yet another mystery, as Herbert Ryan had married his daughter in 1904. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who can throw light on this fascinating episode of Chislehurst history.

Eric Inman

CHISLEHURST ACADEMY 1830 - 1835

The following article is contributed by Jean Pailing, who extracted material from a long book of memoirs by Henry Vizetelly. Perceptive readers of 'Webb' will be familiar with his name, in connection with a reference to cricket on page 232, and to the school on page 51. A second instalment will be in the Autumn 2000 edition.

'My new school was situated at Chislehurst, then undiscovered by the madding crowd of excursionists and undreamt of by the speculative builder, and remarkable for its sequestered and rural beauty. At the time I am speaking of (1831), the place was as secluded as though it was a hundred miles from the metropolis'.

Thus starts Henry Vizetelly as he describes his Chislehurst schooldays, 1830 - 1835, in his book 'Glances back through 70 years'. These memoirs, in two volumes, were published in 1897.

In the dictionary of National Biography, Vizetelly is described as a man of 'miscellaneous' interests and a Pioneer of the Illustrated Press. He does indeed seem to have led an extraordinarily active life as a journalist, publisher and bon-viveur - this latter accounting, no doubt, for his role as a Wine juror at both the Vienna and Paris Exhibitions in the 1870s. On leaving school in 1835 he had trained as an engraver and within a few years had started up the *Pictorial Times* and was soon experimenting with a variety of other illustrated publications. However, in 1865 he was off to Paris and later Berlin as special correspondent to the *Illustrated London News*. He remained in Paris throughout the siege and turned his experiences to good account by producing his two-volume 'Paris in Peril'. After his European assignments he settled back in England and, amongst other ventures, started to publish what were then considered to be rather risqué works by Zola. Because of the perceived obscenity of these books Vizetelly was tried in a court of law and, in 1889, at the age of 69 years he had to endure three month's imprisonment. However, with characteristic vigour he still went ahead with the writing of his 'Glances back

through 70 years' to be published just a year before his death in 1894.

Chislehurst had figured in his life for only 5 years although he does mention a return visit in the early 1870s. The school was kept by a Mr Wyburn. *'Though rather elderly, he was remarkably erect, and with his well-powdered hair, capacious white cravat, and singularly prim attire, presented a most dignified appearance'*. Mr Wyburn seems to have been revered, even in retrospect, but his school might not have survived an OFSTED inspection!

Here is Henry Vizetelly's description. *'The school seems to have been a capital one in all respects save scantiness of the instructions imparted to the pupils, and the lack of anything like discipline. But the boys, of course, never complained of these shortcomings. The food being excellent and plentiful, the daily tasks light and the liberty allowed excessive, the pupils at Chislehurst Academy were as contented as schoolboys are ever likely to be. With the majority it was a matter of principle to learn as little as possible, while the few who were studiously inclined were generally chaffed or bullied into neglecting their tasks. Written exercises were, of course, got through easily enough by the duller boys bribing the sharper boys to do their work for them'.*

'At Chislehurst a boy's status in the school was not determined by his position in his class, but solely by his pugilistic performances. New boys were, of course, put through the customary examination as to where they lived, what their fathers were, how much the latter were worth; whether they had any pretty sisters, and the damsels' ages. This inquisition over, the newcomers were speedily matched against boys of their own size, and had rank assigned to them according to the way they acquitted themselves in these encounters. Though school conflicts of this character were not openly tolerated, they were usually winked at by the boys' mentors, who never seemed at all curious as to the origin of the many discoloured eyes and swollen noses'.

Vizetelly goes on to describe the joys of half holidays. The boys would swagger forth in leather leggings for a day of country sports. In Autumn, innocent nutting expeditions would be the precursors to wholesale pillaging of distant orchards. In the Spring, bird-nesting was the rule. In the Summer there was always cricket but for the equestrians the best prank was to jump on a likely-looking horse which was grazing at leisure in a field, and gallop it round and round until some choleric farmer came upon the scene, brandishing his stick over the 5-bar gate.

Jean Pailing

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