

# 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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## CHISLEHURST SOCIETY WINTER SOCIAL, AT CAMDEN PLACE

This will take place on Thursday 23 November starting at 7pm for 7.30. Tickets cost £13 for which is provided an excellent buffet supper and some seasonal entertainment. Please note that for gentlemen a jacket and tie is essential.

## CHRISTMAS IS COMING ...

If you are looking for books with a local flavour, we are still able to supply copies of Alice Sennett's *Historical Walks Around Chislehurst* for £2 and Roy Hopper's *Chislehurst - a Guide to some Heritage Buildings* for £1.

The reprint of Webb's *History of Chislehurst* is still available for £30.

The new *Heritage Map of Chislehurst* is still available for £3.50.

## HOW TO ORDER:

*Historical Walks*: by post from: Alice Sennett, 1 Copperfield Way, Chislehurst BR7 6RY, enclosing a SAE of A5 (9' x 6½' or 23cm x 15cm) size and a cheque for £2 made payable to The Chislehurst Society.

It is also available from Paper Lane in the High Street, and the Church Row Post Office. It may also be ordered via Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library in the same way as from Mrs Sennett.

*Heritage Buildings*: via Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library, with an A5 SAE and cheque for £1 made payable to The Chislehurst Society.

Webb's *History*: via Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library, indicating your telephone number and address; arrangements will be made either to deliver to you, or for you to collect from Chislehurst Library, and

payment will also be arranged as convenient.

*Heritage Map*: This is available from the Chislehurst Business Centre, Bromley Lane; Dixons, High Street; Michael Sim, Royal Parade. This is an ideal subject for framing, but purchasers will have to make their own arrangements to do so.

## LONDON OPEN HOUSE REPORT

London Open House is Greater London's own response to the wider concept of European Heritage Days. On two successive weekends in September, depending on where you live in relation to Greater London, you may have found local buildings of architectural interest open on either 16 and 17 September (European Heritage Days), or on 23 and 24 September (London Open House). It is only recently that Chislehurst has been involved in LOH, because this depended upon the London Borough of Bromley being willing to participate.

Last year, only Foxbury took part. This year, Camden Place, Babington House School and Ravensbourne College also joined in, and these four are now officially enrolled with the LOH organisation. The implication is that they will be invited to participate every year from now on; but it is still up to the managers of these buildings to accept or decline the invitation.

The churches in Chislehurst, including the Chapel at Farringtons & Stratford House School, were also open this year, but were not involved with the LOH organisation. The reason for this is that over the Greater London region there are so many churches that would like to be involved that it is not feasible to include them all, and therefore it is only those of exceptional architectural or historical value that can be included. The local churches were approached by the Society and asked if they would like to join in, and open their doors on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 September in parallel with the LOH buildings. All

were happy to do so.

The official LOH guide is published by the Guardian newspaper and covers the whole Greater London area. Eleven buildings in the Borough of Bromley were listed, four of these were those in Chislehurst. The Chislehurst Society decided to produce its own local list to include not only those four, but also all the churches, and the resulting leaflet was distributed as widely as possible via Road Stewards, the library and various distribution points in local shops, as well as at the venues involved. The Society obtained permission from Sainsburys to have a stall under its arcade on Saturday 23, from 10am to 4.30pm. A table and chairs were borrowed from the library, and the stall was set up, with various Society publications for sale including the Heritage Map, and copies of Cockpit, Chislehurst Report and the Society publicity leaflet for free distribution. Many sales were made, a few new members were recruited, and many questions were answered. It reinforced the idea of having proper Society premises somewhere in the High Street, or elsewhere, though this seems unlikely to be achieved in the near future. It was not considered really worthwhile to have the stall there again on Sunday, although it was advertised in the leaflet as being there from 10am to noon. We apologise to anyone who was disappointed at not finding us there.

On Saturday evening Roy Hopper gave an illustrated talk at the Methodist Church Hall on the theme of 'Chislehurst's Architectural Heritage', which was attended by more than 60 people. This theme was reiterated in the photographic display mounted in the Annunciation Church over the weekend. The photographs and display equipment were loaned by the Heritage and Urban Design Group of the Planning Division at the Civic Centre. The Church also organised trips up the tower, from the top of which a stunning view can be obtained. Other venues mounted displays relating to their history, and almost all arranged their own stewards. London Open House has its own list of volunteer stewards. In one or two locations the Society was able to provide some extra coverage.

Overall, it appears to have been a successful weekend; the fine weather on the Saturday was a great help, though Sunday was very wet at times which probably reduced the potential number of visitors. Our thanks are due to all those who helped in any way; the whole concept of London Open House is a celebration of our architecture. It is all free, and help is given voluntarily, 'for love'. At this moment there are no plans afoot for next year, apart from the certainty that the four buildings registered with LOH will be invited to do it again in September 2001. The Society is under

no obligation to participate, but some enthusiastic noises have already been heard. Watch this space .....

## **CLASSIC SOUTH EASTERN & CHATHAM RAILWAY STATIONS: CHISLEHURST by Paul O'Callaghan**

When the South Eastern Railway began running trains to Dover, it was via Redhill from London Bridge. However, the SER wanted a way of shortening the journey time to Dover. On 1 July 1865 a new line from the North Kent Line, to Tonbridge on the Dover line, was commenced at a new junction, at St John's station. It was planned to pass through Chislehurst, Orpington and Sevenoaks, and it was to Chislehurst that the first stage of the new railway was opened.

Until 1 September 1866 the station at Chislehurst was known as Chislehurst and Bickley Park. It was originally built beside Lower Camden road, north of Old Hill, where the goods yard and shed stood. The down-side (Chislehurst) station building initially had ornamental ironwork on its roof. The goods yard was on the up-side line, and for a time it marked the end of the line, until the extension to Sevenoaks was built. A small approach road led to the goods yard from Bickley Park Road, and also served the first-class waiting room building, with an internal staircase leading from the road to the rooms. When in 1868 the line was extended to Sevenoaks on 3 March, and to Tonbridge on 1 May, Chislehurst station was moved south to its present site. The line at this time was only a double track. The smaller building on the west side of the station was intended to serve as waiting rooms for first-class passengers, including, it was rumoured, the French Imperial Family who lived at Camden Place in the 1870s. A bookstall also existed within this structure. Later, when use of the building declined, it was let for other purposes, such as workshops, storage, and even as a club room. In the 1980s it was demolished, and today a bus-type shelter stands on the site.

The trains in 1865 ran twelve a day in each direction; however, by 1900 traffic had increased to such an extent that the permanent way had to be doubled with four tracks laid as far as Orpington. This necessitated rebuilding of the station on the 1868 site, and the number of platforms was also doubled from two to four in 1900-1901.

At the south end of the island platform there was once a rather high signal box, controlling the spur line linking the Chislehurst tracks to the Bickley to St Mary Cray line. This link was opened in 1904, on 19 June. This signal box and the one at the goods yard, were both closed in 31 May 1959, when coloured light signals were installed. Facilities for goods traffic were

partially withdrawn on 18 November 1986, but two sidings were retained for ABC mineral traffic, ballast emanating from Lydd in 1991.

Proximity to the Chislehurst Caves resulted in extra trains being laid on by Southern Railway from Cannon Street, to bring people to shelter in the caves during the Second World War. What is not so well known is that during the First World War the Caves were used as an ammunition store, and a railway was laid within the Caves. Battery operated locomotives were used at first, but later an Austin Seven car was used to pull the wagons.

There is a fairly recent housing development on the goods yard site, where two staff cottages were built back in 1878.

*Paul O'Callaghan lives in Orpington, and belongs to the South Eastern & Chatham Railway Preservation Society. He is a regular contributor to its journal. This article is edited from an original that forms part of a series of historical articles, launched by the author, that are published in that journal. For more information on local railways, please write to: The Chairman, SECRPS, 44 Berryhill, Eltham Park, London SE9 1QW.*

*Our thanks to Paul O'Callaghan for contributing the original article, in which he acknowledged Peter Clark for information relating to the waiting rooms, and the typing services of Christine Weedon.*

#### **FIELD TRIP** by Bernard Brown

**This article is reprinted from the *London Historical Research Group Bulletin*, December 1997, with the author's permission.**

When I first moved to the Lower Camden area of Chislehurst back in March 1977, the only bus service to Bromley at the time, apart from the Green Line Coach 725/726, was the single-deck route 227, (Chislehurst and Crystal Palace) which, since April 1991, no longer runs east of Bromley.

Introduced during the Great War as the 109 (Penge and Woolwich) to carry munitions workers, this route, renumbered 227 in 1934, had been the basic service between Chislehurst and Bromley until the extension of route 269 from Sidcup to Bromley in November 1985. The 227's replacement in April 1991 was the 161 (Woolwich and Bromley), and subsequently the present 162 (Petts Wood and Beckenham Junction).

The introduction of the 109 in August 1916, however,

was a part replacement for an even earlier style of transport, in the form of a service of garden-seat brakes operated by C & A Field, local Jobmaster and Cab Proprietor.

Following the opening of the South Eastern Railway branch line to a new terminus known as Chislehurst and Bickley Park in July 1865, one George Thomas Field, age 24 and a native of St Pancras, Middlesex, leased some stables adjoining the Bickley Arms public house and established a Livery and Bait stable business supplying Flays, a form of cab, which attended the railway station to meet all trains to convey passengers to and from Chislehurst village, or West Chislehurst, which lay some two miles away.

Further business was developed in 1868 after Chislehurst ceased to be a terminus when the line was extended to Sevenoaks and Tonbridge. By 1885 the business had grown sufficiently to acquire additional stabling at The Crown public house on Chislehurst Common, and at the Queen, now Queen's Head, West Chislehurst. At that time George Field resided at Florence Villas, Chislehurst Hill, now Old Hill, with his wife and their five children. In 1890, his son, Charles Field, became Post Master of the Lower Camden Post Office at 31 Chislehurst Road, and it was from this point that George Field introduced his brake service on Thursdays only to Bromley Market Place, running direct via Chislehurst Road, and not over the later 227 route via Bickley Park Road.

At the turn of the century George Field had stables at the Bickley Hotel, the Tiger's Head, the Crown Inn and the Bull's Head Hotel.

The market day service proved extremely popular, and a flat fare of 6d (2½p) was charged. In October 1904, Field and Son introduced a daily service to Bromley with seven return journeys on weekdays, and six on Sundays, charging separate fares as follows:

From Lower Camden PO to Bickley, 2d (1p), Widmore 3d (1p), Bromley 4d (2p).

From Bromley Market Place to Bickley 2d, Widmore 2d.

Contemporary directories advertised the service thus:

'Brakes run at intervals throughout the day between Lower Camden and Bromley Market Place at the following times:-

Weekdays:

Chislehurst: Depart 9am, 11am, 2.10pm, 3.15pm, 4.20pm, 6pm, 7.10pm.

Bromley Market: Depart 10.30am, 12.30pm, 2.45pm, 5pm, 6.30pm, 7.45pm.

Sundays:

Chislehurst: Depart 10.30am, 11.45am, 2.15pm, 3.50pm, 6pm, 8.45pm.

Bromley Market: Depart 11am, 12.30pm, 2.45pm, 4.30pm, 6.30pm, 8.44pm.'

Much of Field's business consisted of local private-hire work, an example being the conveyance of the first works outing for the workmen of Chislehurst Urban District Council in September 1913, when employees were conveyed between Lower Camden and Orpington Station for a 'Beanfeast' in Hastings.

August 1914 saw the outbreak of the Great War, when so many horses were commandeered. Although Field's brake service continued to be shown in directories up until 1915, it is doubtful that the brakes were still running the following year when the 109 motor-bus service was introduced. George Field continued as a Carriage Proprietor and Jobmaster, although the Chislehurst Common stables at The Crown were given up; and Field finally disappears from commercial directories after 1929.

Apart from the occasional Railway Replacement Service, the Lower Camden area has not been served for at least 80 years. Since 31 January 1994, however, Field's service to Bromley via Chislehurst Road has been revived, albeit on Fridays only, in the form of Motability service 853 (Greenwich and Bromley), which is operated on behalf of London Transport by Crystals Ltd, over roads plied by Field's brakes a century ago.

### A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE PRINCE IMPERIAL

The following article is taken from a Canadian national newspaper, and was sent to Miss Pat Bushell by an ex-Chislehurst resident, who emigrated in the 1950s. She in her turn conveyed it to the editor of the Cockpit, and it is reproduced here in Miss Bushell's own words.

The article states that the dusty village of Uqweqwe in South Africa's remote interior, where the Prince Imperial was speared to death by Zulu warriors during the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, has been placed firmly on the tourist map, thanks to a French lecturer. He has established a cultural tourist route in honour of Prince Louis, which takes in the main stages of the Prince's brief sojourn in South Africa. It includes visits to art galleries and museums where visitors can see photographs of the Prince together with other

memorabilia. The tour ends at Uqweqwe where there is a memorial to the Prince, and the graves of two British soldiers killed with him. The article states that there is a steady flow of tourists, most of whom are French. The local community has been given the task of tending the memorial, and caring for the tourists. This has benefited the village, and at the local school the children are being taught French so that they can communicate with tourists.

So all these years after the people of Chislehurst erected a monument to the Prince Imperial, a memorial to him has now been erected in a remote village in South Africa, where he met his death.

Pat Bushell

### MEMORIES OF CHISLEHURST CAVES IN WARTIME

The following article originally appeared in *The Leader* and was donated by the author, Alex Gilham.

It is most surprising that the story of Chislehurst Caves, especially its association with events during the last war, has received such scant attention until now. A wealth of interest is stored in the memories of people who sheltered there.

My own experience was just a brief interlude in its long history. It started when my wife and small son were evacuated to Oxford and, with our house a casualty of an air raid, I was invited along with Roy Cripps, the projectionist at the local cinema, and his wife, Gladys, to visit the caves and see for myself the community which had been established there.

It appeared very much a local effort, a tribute to the inspiration of several prominent people.

A church organ and place of worship occupied a corner of the first vast cavern otherwise filled with people seeking refuge from the nightly bombing and danger outside. Some I noticed were happily settled in deckchairs, determined to make the most of it.

We were so engrossed by the shops, the barber's shop, first-aid posts and children's wards, that we lost track of time and on returning to the entrance found a red light on, indicating that a raid was in progress.

That settled it; we were in for the night, no-one being allowed out during a raid; but where to sleep? It was then that Roy Cripps spotted a familiar face. I seem to remember that it was a Mr Cobb, who ran a greengrocer's shop in Chislehurst at the time. He invited us to stay with him and his family, and led us from the first cave into a second, and another, each

successively smaller, but sheltering large gatherings of people.

From there we traversed lengths of corridors chiselled out of solid chalk, with droplets of water falling from embedded flints and reflecting the light from the overhead bulbs. It all seemed so unreal.

At intervals the corridors widened into alcoves, and it was one of these that on later occasions afforded an amusing landmark on the nightly trip to our quarters.

Mum, with table laid, awaiting the return of her family, presumably from work, rugs on floor, a couple of pictures on the walls - home from home. It was like invading the privacy of someone's living room.

We continued, electric light giving way to candles, until we arrived at the Druid section, with its altar some four feet high, wide and flat. All around, space was taken up with sleeping children and parents. The warden sadly advised that the altar was the only vacant area. With much misgiving, we accepted, and with a couple of deckchairs kindly lent by our friends, prepared to kip down for the night. It became our bedroom for three months, two beds being installed later.

One evening the quiet was broken by an unearthly clatter, and we found ourselves brushed by an extremely angry crowd, rough-handling a young couple for allegedly taking photographs. One could forgive the anxiety, with cries of 'spies' everywhere, but fortunately it was all proved to be a mistake, and the happy atmosphere of the caves was restored.

Life was going smoothly. I was cycling to work in Woolwich every day, then ditching my bike in a nearby wood and seeking safety in the caves at night. Following a lengthy period of nightly attacks, the early months of 1941 saw a welcome lull in the German bombing, but the 'armistice' ended in May with two disastrous raids on London, with great loss of life and homes; and the caves really came into their own with the authorities taking belated advantage of their potential by installing wooden bunks for the thousands more now seeking refuge, many coming from outlying districts.

I shall never forget the night we worked all through, erecting the bunks, and the heartfelt thanks of relieved parents as their children were safely tucked up. The estimated 6,000 when I first took refuge grew to 15,000 or more.

Reference is sometimes made to ghostly mutterings in the caves, and although I cannot claim any personal

experience of this, it seems strange that of the four of us taking refuge on the altar, two of us suffered serious illness some time after and the other two died prematurely. Coincidence, you may say - but who knows?

Alex Gilham

## ERRORS IN WEBB'S HISTORY OF CHISLEHURST

This is the first in a series of short articles which will indicate various errors, illuminate some obscurities, and attempt to update some areas in our famous local history book. Enthusiastic readers may wish to update their copies with marginal notes. They are also invited to look at the list of Corrigenda on page 448 in the reprint, or following the contents pages in the original. Most errors are in transcription, but some are failures to check dates and facts. If any perceptive readers spot an apparent error that has not previously been noted, please write to the Editor of Cockpit with details.

Page 106, bottom line: for 1751 read 1730 as the correct date of this marriage. The Bettenson family tree (page 157-8 in the reprint, page 156 original), and the text on page 163 confirm this. 1751 was the date of John Selwyn's death. When Sir Edward Bettenson died in 1733, Selwyn became Lord of the Manors, and cleared the mortgage on the estates. He then gave Scadbury to Thomas Townshend, his son-in-law, in 1736 (page 159). Only three years later, in 1739, Albinia, Thomas' young wife, died (Bettenson family tree). On the death in 1751 of John Selwyn, Thomas Townshend became Lord of the Manors, and in 1752 he bought Frognal, the estate next door to Scadbury, (page 278).

Armed with these dates we can now make sense of the paragraph on page 164: 'It is said that Mr Townshend, on becoming master of the Scadbury property, (1736) pulled down the ancient manor house ... but that upon the death of his wife (1739) he abandoned the project. A few years later (1752) he purchased ... Frognal ...'. From this we appear able to date the demolition of the moated manor house to between 1736 and 1739. Webb himself wrote page 106 and following, and George Miller wrote the Itinerary chapters where the other facts are found. It makes one wonder to what extent, if any, joint authors pursuing much the same paths, really carefully check each other's work.

An even worse error was recently brought to the Editor's attention by John Winter-Lotimer, who now lives in Camden, North London. He wrote an article for the Camden History Review, No 23, 1999, entitled 'The Camden Connection', in which he stated that the motto on the facade of Camden Place, 'Malo mori,

quam foedari' is that of the Strode family. The Editor wrote to him, pointing out that in Webb it quite clearly states on page 245 that this is the motto of Lord Camden. Mr Winter-Lotimer said he would check, though he was quite prepared to believe Webb (actually this section is by George Miller, but 'Webb' is a convenient reference). Eventually he replied that the motto is indeed that of the Strode family, which he had verified in three unimpeachable sources, very well known to librarians. Lord Camden's motto, for the record, is 'Judicium parium aut lex terrae': 'The judgement of my peers or the law of the land'. 'Take nothing for granted if you can check it', said Kipling. What an excellent motto for all would-be historians.

## KEMNAL MANOR

by Gail Wright

The following article is adapted, with her permission, from the original by Gail Wright, first published in *Rabbit*, the Heritage and Urban Design Newsletter, in 1998.

### Introduction

Walkers in the Kemnal area beyond Foxbury are usually intrigued by the remnants of foundations seen there, and visions of ancient manor houses are invoked. Here stood a large Victorian house, called Kemnal Manor, that was destroyed by fire in the 1970s. There are ample references in Webb's *History of Chislehurst* to the manor itself, and more briefly to the house, which was contemporary with Foxbury. It may be helpful to put the house in perspective by saying that it was no more a proper manor house than were Walden Manor in Walden Road, where Ravensbourne College now stands, or the Manor House in Manor Park Road; all were titles bestowed on these houses by their owners.

Kemnal Manor, as the article indicates, was held by New College, Oxford, from 1391 until the 1870s when the land was sold for building. There was never a resident Lord of the Manor dwelling here, only a bailiff who lived in a house nearby, who was answerable to New College for the proper conduct of their distant property. This house is the one referred to in the sale particulars of 1894 as '... an Ancient Residence'; perfectly true, of course, but not really qualifying for quite such reverent tones! With all this in mind, here follows Gail Wright's article.

Kemnal Manor was situated next door to Foxbury, not far from Scadbury Park in east Chislehurst. According to the sale particulars of 1894, Kemnal Manor was a 'thoroughly well-built and admirably-planned mansion, replete with all Modern Requirements and Sanitary

Appliances (erected 1875 on the site of an Ancient Residence), protected by two picturesque lodge entrances, besides three separate dwellings for Coachmans' and Gardeners' families'. The description goes on to describe first rate stables, delightful pleasure grounds, wilderness, woodlands, fruit and vegetable gardens, and orchards - over one-hundred and eleven acres in all.

At the front of the manor there was a 14 feet high open porch, with sides glazed in leaded lights, and a door to a vestibule paved with coloured tiles, opening through an inner glazed door to a 'noble and lofty' entrance hall, measuring about 30 feet by 26 feet.

The drawing room was not quite as large, at 24 feet 6 inches by 23 feet 6 inches, fitted with a carved statuary marble mantelpiece, steel ormolu stove, with painted tile panels and tiled hearth. It had a bay window, and a large plate-glass window looking into a conservatory. It had what Estate Agents described as 'expensively decorated walls and ceilings'.

On the first floor were fifteen bed and dressing rooms, with numerous bathrooms, servants' rooms, and nurseries. There was also a 'Spacious principle landing and staircase, and picture gallery lighted through tinted glass from the roof'.

The second floor contained only three bedrooms, a box room, and a tank room. It was obviously an extremely grand 'manor', which may have been sold at this time to the James Herman Rosenthal who appears as the owner in *Kelly's Directory* of 1913.

Rosenthal lived there with his wife Linda Larita Rosenthal until approximately 1915, when the Rosenthals changed their name to Kemnal. This may have been due to their possible Jewish or German origins, and the fear of reprisals during war-time. After 1925 only Linda's name appears, until 1935, when two other names also appear in the Register of Electors: Louisa May Friend, and Marjorie Laura Hubbard.

Before the 1894 sale, Samuel Bailey Verner Asser had bought the land and the old house from New College, Oxford, in 1872, rebuilt it, and sold it to Mr Richard Johnson. At the same time, Asser sold part of the estate to Henry Frederick Tiarks, who built Foxbury there. New College had owned the manor since the late 14th century when William of Wykeham ('Manners maketh man'), Bishop of Winchester, had bequeathed it to them. Before that, in 1259, the earliest known owner of the land, Alexander de Chomenhole, sold it to what later became Hornchurch Priory, in Essex.

The name 'Chomenhole' (CH being pronounced as K) is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'Cyma's Hollow'.

### FRANCIS HENRY MURRAY, RECTOR OF CHISLEHURST 1846 - 1902

We are pleased to announce a forthcoming biography by Mrs Jean Pailing, of Chislehurst's longest serving Rector, which is due for publication in two years from now. Refer also to her earlier article in *Cockpit* No 70, June 1998.

There can be little doubt that Canon Francis Murray deserves to be numbered among the greatest of Chislehurst's historical figures. He came here when it was still a quiet rural parish, and provided inspiration and leadership during a turbulent and exciting period of growth following the arrival of the railway here in 1865, and the exile here of the French Imperial family in 1870. He took his duties as Rector very seriously, and earned the affection and respect of a large number of people, for many of whom he became a guiding light and true friend.

Mrs Pailing, who attends St Nicholas Church, and is a bellringer there, became interested in Canon Murray some time ago, and decided to write his biography. He contributed his personal recollections to Webb's *History of Chislehurst* and therein were just a few details of his own background and early life. These brief hints provided Mrs Pailing's starting points, and over the past four years she has researched much background and detail about events and people in his life. For example, why was he born on the Isle of Man, and why did the family have to leave in such a hurry? What prompted Murray's immediate attention to the interior of St Nicholas' Church when he arrived in 1846? What nurtured his personal faith? Is it possible to find more about the two tragedies in his life: the death, so young, of his first wife Fanny in 1850 and then, in 1870, of his younger son, Herbert? These questions, and more, are covered in the book, which will be brought out to commemorate the centenary of his death in October 2002.

The book will be a paperback, and although the price is not yet fixed it is likely to be less than £10. When further details are known, there will be an opportunity to order copies in advance of publication. Watch for announcements in future editions of *Cockpit*.

### CHISLEHURST ACADEMY, 1830 - 1835

Here is the second instalment of Henry Vizetelly's memories of his schooldays in Chislehurst, extracted from his Memoirs, *Glances back through seventy years*. The school was situated in Heathfield Lane, near the

pond.

November 5<sup>th</sup> celebrations once gave rise to a glorious occasion for the boys. *'Chislehurst village was divided into what was termed up-town and down-town, the common separating the two. There was always a bitter struggle between the two as to which should have the largest bonfire: our school being down-town we naturally rendered all the assistance we could. Stacking the furze and faggots began about the middle of October and each party anxiously watched the other's progress. On one occasion, having noticed that the up-town bonfire was considerably larger than any the down-townsmen would succeed in stacking, we resolved to kindle it surreptitiously before the proper time. To accomplish this, three of us were lowered out of our bedroom windows, on a cold November morning, when, after possessing ourselves of some tar and turpentine, purchased the day before from the village house-painter, and a heap of hay-bands, with tinder-box, matches and lantern (which we prevailed on the stableman to lend us) we scaled the high school-gateway and boldly sallied forth'.*

*'We hurried across the common to the old village cockpit in which the materials for the up-town bonfire were stacked. The hay-bands were deposited amongst the furze and faggots, thoroughly soaked in tar and turpentine and set alight. We then scampered off at full speed to be welcomed back to our bedrooms by our own look-out team: the bonfire had instantly blazed up with loud crackling noises which roused the young fellows who had been deputed to keep watch but their vigorous attempts to extinguish the bonfire were to no avail and the bonfire burnt itself out completely. Down-town there were the wildest rejoicing over our successful enterprise'.*

Vizetelly tells of more outrageous schoolboy adventures and then goes on to mention the church which, at that time, still had its old box pews prior to the Rev Francis Murray's alterations in 1846. *'Chislehurst Church had not then been restored and decorated out of all recognition on the part of those who had grown familiar with it in its more primitive state. The interior still possessed all the quaint picturesqueness which antiquity usually confers, but which the restorer generally does his best to obliterate'.* (So much for Francis Murray's efforts!).

*'I have a dim recollection of a fine monument to one of the Walsinghams but the monument we boys took most interest in was one, I think, to Sir Philip Warwick by reason of the rusty helmet and sword, and the moth-eaten gauntlets dangling above it'.*

*'In the early summer-time a genuine rustic fair used to*

*be held on Chislehurst common. This did not depend for its attractions on any vulgar human or animal monstrosities, or circuses, menageries, peep-shows, roundabouts, or nonsense of that kind. Such old English sports as single-stick, wrestling and jingling - all in the ancient cockpit by the church - with climbing the greasy pole, walking the bowsprit across the deepest pond on the common, jumping in sacks, racing blindfold with wheelbarrows, and races by women for hem-stitched and gaily be-ribboned smocks formed the regular programme. The gypsies attending the fair, mostly all of fine physical development, were the chief prize competitors at single-stick, wrestling and women's races ... ..*

When Vizetelly returned to Chislehurst soon after 1870, he was surprised to see how the railway had transformed the place. *'Adjoining the station were rows of pleasant villas and new roads intersected the woods. The old mill near the cricket ground had disappeared, and houses occupied the site. Chislehurst Academy had been converted into a gentleman's residence and around the common many new houses had been built. The interior of the church had been more or less Romanised and in the trim-kept churchyard the newer graves were scarcely visible under their chaplets and clusters of flowers. The quaint little manor house had been enlarged and restored, the thoroughfare through Scabury Park had been closed and the public could no longer enjoy the old charming walk to Sidcup. Much of Bonar's park was covered with fine mansions, and sequestered Woodheath had been recently lotted out by surveyors for building purposes. A brand new gateway gave access to the grounds of Camden House'*.

While Vizetelly was meditating on the changes at Camden House the royal party happened to pass through the gilded gateway on to the common where *'a small crowd of well-dressed sycophants were assembled to receive them with that blind obsequious homage which our tuft-hunting British race invariably accords to rank'*. The much-travelled Vizetelly had witnessed the devastation and death in Paris which had preceded the expulsion of the Emperor and he was no fan of the Emperor. *'I could not but feel that most of the grave disasters which had befallen France had their origin in that imperial rule so much belaudered by English people and I preferred to stand aside and not to seem to render respect where I felt that respect was certainly not due'*.

Thus, a now cynical Vizetelly ends his chapter about

Chislehurst: his book, which is not easily located continues through 2 volumes, packed with his adventures in London and Europe. Agreed, he does become rather opinionated and cantankerous but his books are highly entertaining and, should any reader of *The Cockpit* discover them in a second-hand bookshop, I would very much like to hear of their whereabouts.

Jean Pailing

## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES - A LETTER

Dear Editor

Seeing the article about photographic archives in the Spring 2000 issue of *Cockpit* I thought your readers might be interested to learn about the Civic Trust's collection of images that we are currently cataloguing and making available to the public.

The Civic Trust is the umbrella organisation for all local civic and amenity societies. The Chislehurst Society joined in the early days after we were founded in 1957. Over the past 47 years we have built up a vast collection of prints and slides showing all aspects of our work to encourage the improvement of the built environment. As well as showing old buildings and fine architecture our photographs also reveal how 'ordinary' places have changed over the years. We obtained many of our photographs as a result of our acclaimed Civic Trust Awards scheme which takes place every year and which highlights the very best in environmental improvement throughout the UK. We now have at least 25,000 photographs, maybe more for we are constantly adding to our collection. These images are all being scanned onto computer and being catalogued using special software. So far we have completed about a quarter of the total and are already reaping the benefits of being able to retrieve images from the past at the touch of a button. We intend to make the collection available to the general public using the internet.

If anyone would like to know more about this photographic archive project they are very welcome to contact me at the Civic Trust. Alternatively there is a brief introduction and selection of images on our website at [www.civictrust.org.uk](http://www.civictrust.org.uk).

Yours sincerely  
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