

# WADHURST HISTORY SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER NO. 2 - MAR 2004

There can be no doubt that an interest in all aspects of our history is alive and well - after three months of formal existence, the Wadhurst History Society has 48 family and 58 single members with several more 'in the pipeline'; the finances look healthy and we have bought our own recording machine, microphone and disks for the Oral History Task Group.

We have a full programme of talks for 2004 and are well on the way to completing the details for 2005 - and attendance at the first two meetings has exceeded all our expectations and has almost defeated the capacity of the FTA. The coach for the first Society outing to the Weald and Downland Museum is also filling fast.

Task Groups are forming - and beginning to sort out what they want to study and how they are going to work; more details inside this newsletter for those who may want to get involved but have not yet committed themselves. Don't be afraid to come forward - none of us is an expert and we are all feeling our way forward: making notes of what we do and putting forward ideas for future work.

This issue of the newsletter carries reports on the meetings the Society has held - volunteers to write up future meetings would be most welcome! Otherwise the Chairman will have to twist arms. Volunteers to give the vote of thanks would also be welcome - as you know, they say a volunteer is worth

two pressed men [or in these days of equal opportunity - women].

Also inside are articles from members - there must be many more out there just waiting for submission to the Editor, so look them out: and if you haven't written up your memories - or put down your recollections of life and work in Wadhurst in the last century: start NOW!

Book reviews and reports from other related societies are also welcome: one review is inside. Details of interesting websites would also be welcome: the Internet is full of useful sources of information, if only you can remember where you first found them - so pass the information on to the Newsletter as you find them. Worth a visit, if you are interested in trying to read old manuscripts, is

<http://paleo.anglo-norman.org>

a site that offers a full on-line training course in palaeography. This course is also available on CD; the Editor has a copy if anyone is interested. And don't forget the Society's website

[www.wadhurst.info/whs](http://www.wadhurst.info/whs)

where you will find the latest news and pictures.

SO: don't forget - it is your Society and will only be as good as YOU make it. Your committee will do its bit to keep things running but we need your ideas at every stage.

## The Committee

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## Meeting Schedule

Thur 18 Mar	David Martin Medieval Houses and their construction
Tues 20 Apr	Richard Rose The Courthopes of Whiligh
Thur 20 May	World War I, Aubers Ridge and the Royal Sussex Regiment
Tues 15 Jun	Gwen Jones The Hop Industry in Sussex & Kent
July / August	No meetings
Thur 16 Sep	Pat Wright The Medieval Life Style
Tues 19 Oct	Elizabeth Hughes Churchyards—and what they can tell us
Thur 18 Nov	Jeremy Hodgkinson Wealden Iron Industry
<b>Thur 16 Dec</b>	AGM - members' talks and social

## Forthcoming Events

**Sunday 9 May** - the Royal Sussex Aubers Parade

11:45 Service and Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial  
12:15 Parade to Commemoration Hall

**Sunday 13 June** - Wadhurst History Society coach trip to the Weald and Downland Museum Singleton, nr Chichester.

Depart at 08:45 [not 09:00] from the Greyhound; arrival back expected at 17:30. The coach cost, entrance and conducted tour is included in the price of £20. Please let Rachel Ring [Chestnuts, Stone Cross Road TN5 6LR—01892 783 455] have your deposit of £10 now, payable by cheque to Wadhurst History Society and note that the balance will be due at the May meeting at the latest.

**Sunday 1 August—Summer Barbeque at Greenman Farm: a Society Fund-raising event**

## Notes on the meeting held on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2004

The first lecture meeting of the Society was a great success with nearly ninety members and visitors attending - chair after chair having to be brought in to accommodate members as they streamed through the door of the FTA Conference Centre.

The lecture, given by Dr Al Thomson from the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex was entitled "Making the most of Memories: the potential for oral history".

Back as far as time, pre-literate societies told stories, passing them down over generations. These have become embroidered and embellished to blend fact with fiction. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century the field really opened up but the data was mainly about the leaders of that generation, the politicians, the military and the legal profession. Increasingly the emphasis of what and whose stories were important was recognised by, for example, Beatrice and Stanley Webb's social researches into the trade union movement, the history of the working class, domestic service and women's place in society. Latterly subjects like the history of disabilities have been recorded if necessary using Braille and sign language.

Improving technology produced an outflow of research in the 1960's but by the 70's there was criticism that people's memories were unreliable and it was difficult to check sources. Now though, oral history is recognised as an important way of recreating the richness of life and events. Significant details about an incident can be learnt where the teller may not necessarily have been present, but nevertheless the facts are true. Different people's accounts of the same event broaden the understanding.

Drawing on his work in Australia, Al Thomson played part of his recording of an Anzac veteran and challenged the audience to detect the hidden messages. The society's Oral History working group were given guidelines for starting their project in Wadhurst: prepare a list of topics to be covered; childhood, adult life, wartime memories, politics and change and village life could be a starting point. The need to document was stressed, all interviews must be recorded and copies sent to the participants. Written permission must be obtained and confidences respected.

Dr Thomson gave a fascinating lecture, a blend of interesting anecdotes based on his work and facts on setting up a project. He kindly agreed that the society could use the format he has developed for his students' use when conducting interviews. Question time at the end was very lively and was followed by a stampede to study a display of a research project along the Sussex Ouse.

*Anna Monaghan*

### Historical & Interesting Views of Tunbridge Wells

A remarkable CD giving a tour round the entirety of Tunbridge Wells, past and present - with current street scenes and historic material. £10 + £1 p&p: HGRTWS, 70 London Rd, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1DX or download an order form from the website [www.wadhurst.info/whs](http://www.wadhurst.info/whs)

## Notes on the meeting held on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2004

Geoff Mead of Sussex University, expert on the Geology of our region and its Social Implications, began his illustrated talk by encouraging people to look not just at their local area but to consider the wider picture of Wealden society.

He explained that 130 million years ago a huge delta ran from northern France across to our area and beyond. Wadhurst would have been in the middle, an area of sand and mud flats, sparse landscape with pre-historic creatures roaming, leaving huge footprints in the strata. 60 million years ago, South Africa experienced huge land shifts, causing enormous tidal waves that rippled all the way to England. Wadhurst was right under the resulting anticline. He explained the geological make-up of the South-East and how it was wrenched from the continent 9,000 years ago. World War I soldiers would, therefore, have recognised the countryside in Flanders as being so similar to ours.

Ashdown Forest, known geologically as Ashdown beds, was a bit different: a wild-scape suited to hunting but now, like those round Battle, more attractive because of the farming of the last 1,500 years. Over the last few centuries, heavy rainfall in the South-East, and particularly in our area, has made farming difficult; great for oats but not for animals. When HMS Victory was being built at Chatham, oak trunks could take three years to reach the dockyard as they were bogged down in narrow lanes.

Brick-making, pottery and iron production proved most suited to our area, witness our 35 iron memorial slabs. Warbleton was the largest cannon-producing area: iron cannon were exchanged with the King of Morocco for saltpetre for gun powder. The King sold them on to the Spanish; the Spanish put them on to their ships and fired on us during the Spanish Armada. An analogy was drawn with the Falklands Conflict (1982) where an Uckfield firm supplied a small but vital component for the Exocet missiles fired at us.

Hops were introduced from abroad and large hop farms were still commonplace till the 1950s. There were links between the hard landscape and non-conformist worship whose chapels were stark and simple buildings. Meanwhile the harder sandstone of Mid-Sussex created firm natural roads. Newick – Dallington areas are still cattle fattening countryside, particularly of the Sussex Breed. Historically cattle were brought down to this area from the Pennines, Ireland and Wales for fattening. Chicken farming is another Wealden activity which has been going on for hundreds of years – most recently egg production e.g. Stonegate eggs.

England's most heavily timbered areas are still East and West Sussex with their long tradition of coppice cutting.

Mr Mead then went on to describe the concentration of ownership – where a parish has one large landowner very much in control of every activity. Wadhurst and its environs, however, had dispersed ownership which allowed for greater diversity.

Temperatures: have changed over time; today the coldest inland area is Bodiam, the warmest Plumpton. Eastbourne never sees snow; in Wadhurst it lasts for days. Mr Mead concluded by emphasising that the High Weald was still very much agricultural and that his slides showed a picture of continuity in many ways.

*Chris Ring*

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Peter Brandon in his book 'The Kent and Sussex Weald' has more information on chicken farming:

"The most important innovation was poultry farming. Chickens for market as an adjunct to farming had been kept in the High Weald since time immemorial, but increased yearly with agricultural depression and largely accounted for the district suffering less than others. A smallholder with poultry was often better off than a larger farm without it. It was said that a farmer who kept 100 hens properly looked after earned more from them than from the same number of breeding ewes. Given fair land, a man, his wife and four to six children needed about 50 acres to make a living at this period [C 19<sup>th</sup>]. Typically he lived harder and worked harder than the average labourer. He sowed a few acres of corn, kept a few cows and used the commons for the younger stock. In the winter a marsh farmer sent him some sheep which got a precarious living running all over the farm and with this he could pay his rent. A chicken farm could be more profitable, and smaller, and accordingly some landlords split up larger farms for them.

Poultry farming was especially suited to small farms because of the amount of skill and supervision required, but its success was largely due to the degree of organisation amongst the small producers. There were two distinct divisions, rearing and fattening, because specialist poultry farms did not exist, owing principally to the fear of disease. Fatteners (long called also higglers) collected 'lean' fowls from rearers by means of light carts over a wide area between Uckfield and the Kent border, kept them for a month or so in cages (cramming them for the last part of the period), and sold them deadweight principally to Leadenhall and the central markets in London by highly successful marketing using special vans attached to passenger trains at Heathfield and Uckfield. More than one million fowls were sent by rail to London in 1893. To fetch the highest prices the chickens were marketed as 'Surrey fowls'. Oats and separated milk produced on the farm were fed to the poultry and their manure rapidly revived exhausted soil. Thus cows and chickens went well together. To dispense with labour, cramming, which was previously performed by hand, was now done by means of a cramming machine worked by treadle. Rather oddly the speckled Sussex fowl, so good for the table with his white legs and heavy body, was allowed to die out. The vicar of Heathfield stated that poultry farming tended to early marriages as young men saved money quickly and also offered employment to women and children. Indeed an intelligent, thrifty young man, labourer or smallholder, working week in and week out as long as there was daylight, found the means to rise. The want of a similar organisation for eggs deprived the English farmer of an egg market, for which there was an enormous unsupplied demand, and which would have enabled Wealdsmen to compete successfully with the foreigner. [p 226-7]

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### Lament of the Sussex Ironmaster [Anon]

My sledge and hammer lie declined,  
My bellows too have lost their wind,  
My fires extinct, my forge decayed,  
My vice is in the dust all laid,  
My charcoals spent, my iron gone,  
My heart is tired, my work is done,  
My fire dried corpse here lies at rest,  
My soul, smoke like, soars to be blest.

## TASK GROUPS

For many members of the Society, the possibility of exploring our past is important. The Inaugural Meeting on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2003 was devoted to this aspect - 32 people attended.

**Welcome:** Heather Woodward outlined the format and objectives of the evening. The resources available to the Task Groups for research and support include:

- ◆ East Sussex Record Office in Lewes
- ◆ Sussex Archaeological Society, Barbican House, Lewes
- ◆ Church records
- ◆ Public Record Office
- ◆ Census Returns
- ◆ Local books
- ◆ Local residents
- ◆ College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, London

Further suggestions:

- ◆ The Met Office for research into climate changes and their effects e.g on industry. Holds records for Wadhurst for over 100 years. Sue Head has 1881 record.
- ◆ Tunbridge Wells Family History Group
- ◆ The previous Wadhurst History Society
- ◆ Cathedral Archives - Canterbury and Chichester

**Keeping Records:** Each task group must keep careful notes about what they discover. Facts and information will be cross-referenced on to a centralised card index and thus made accessible to all other task groups. Full reference to be at top of each card.

The cards from the task groups will be available alongside those of Kenneth Ascott for his history of education in Wadhurst.

Build up a Library of our own reference works. Mrs. Bream has kindly donated a good run of the publication *Archaeologica Cantiana 1983—1995*. Any other similar material would be gratefully received. Also publications from related societies.

People must be persuaded and reminded not to throw things away. E.g photos, artefacts, bills, accounts etc. House clearance!

## Progress to date—and contacts

**Oral History [OH]:** Heather Woodward 783212

Interviewee needs to be relaxed. List of suitable questions has been produced. Main topic for discussion should be established but not slavishly adhered to. The list is a "memory-jogger" rather than prescriptive.

Preliminary talk and interview could take between one hour and three. This would mean six hours of transcription per one hour. Transcription is important and could be problematic. Offers of help needed.

Interviewers have to be aware of "fluidity of memory". Cross-referencing on to card index will be particularly important for this group but also for most other task groups.

Topic areas aimed at for 2004:

Two world wars                      Childhood in Wadhurst

General living in Wadhurst

Interviews will be generalised but bring out points for the above focus areas.

For 2004: aim at two full interviews per interviewer, all tape recorded and transcribed. Over 50 interviewees have been identified.

Limitations and signed agreements essential.

**Mediæval Buildings:** Bryan Bell 782 845

**Great Estates:** Val Tunbridge 782 498

These two groups have so much in common that they are merging into one - **Estates and Buildings [EB]**. They will cover individual buildings up to the early 1500s and all the large estates. First visit to Church on 24<sup>th</sup> January. Looking for pamphlets, leaflets, books etc.

Estates work is starting by identifying the larger estates and collecting material about them. Future work: visit Wadhurst Park and Bellerbys College, look closer at Church and visit Record Office in Lewes. *Son et Lumière* script would be useful summary. Identification of large houses in village and small cottages.

Tithe Map to see who owned the properties. Progress through recent records.

Changing estates and the social implications.

Scrag Oak, Wadhurst Park, Tappington Grange.

**Family History [FH]:**

Emma Richardson 01580 860395

600 – 700 descriptions available. Records on headstones in Church.

Areas of study: Victorian family records; people who emigrated 1860s and 1870s. Hope to produce a small pamphlet by the end of 2004 detailing history of families.

**Agriculture and Industry [AI]**

Identify industry in area – refer to books.

Iron industry – forges and furnaces. Brick-making – book recently published.

Agricultural Industry in High Weald – Peter Brandon with reference to Marlpit.

L. Westock 20<sup>th</sup> Century backwards with special reference to dairy industry.

Rolls. Brewing hops and cider-making also to be researched.

**Local Development [LD]:**

Rachel Ring 783 455

At our first meeting, attended by 8 people, we decided to compare the Courthope map of around 1850, which also gave the names of occupants and trades if appropriate, with the latest Ordnance Survey map of the same area. At the second meeting, we planned to walk the High Street—but found too much of interest to get beyond the Lower High Street!

Comparisons and additions will be recorded on a new map we plan to draw, showing house names or numbers, plus occupants' names and trades. From this point we hope to trace from census records the chang-

es of usage over time. Hopefully along the way books and trade publications will help. Any ideas - or papers - from anyone will be most welcome.

### Discussion:

Clearly the Wadhurst History Society has only started to scratch the surface of what it might do over the years - but a good start has been made. Record keeping is vital - and key word indexes will be the best way for all groups to facilitate and enhance cross-referencing, not least because the work of any one group will inevitably be of interest to others; indeed it may make sense to amalgamate other groups as work proceeds.

The Committee has decided that any item of information, recorded by any Task Group, should be given a reference in the form 04/OH/001 i.e. the year, then two letters reflecting the group [as above], and the last three digits the specific item.

We ask that groups use the 8" by 5" record cards provided, either in ink or typescript. The cards should be stored in numerical order in the card boxes also provided.

We have already begun to create an index of keywords to link back to the individual records. Each item has against it the appropriate reference codes, so that others can benefit from the work of every other group.

It would be helpful if task group leaders could let Heather [contact details under Committee above] have, as soon as possible, their own ideas of keywords which are likely to be relevant to their own areas of research, plus a list of any material already acquired with its appropriate coding.

We have yet to work out the best way forward for task group meetings; the idea of using time after a monthly talk has not been successful. The Newsletter is one way of keeping people in touch but we need better additional mechanisms. Communication between groups is also important and we need to expand the use of e-mail, remembering that not all the membership has access to - or wishes to use - the Internet.

Directly relevant to all this is the last part of a letter received by the Editor, the earlier part of which is also of interest to our business:

*In Newsletter no. 1, you posed the question "Whose family has the longest connection with Wadhurst?" There is one that has been with us since the twelfth century, so unless the Wada line can be found ... !*

*The archaeological record and family trees from the twelfth century to the present day show them as being with us, and building or living in at some time most of the main houses of Wadhurst; they and their many cousins at Snape, Great Shoemiths, Butts, Pell, Whiligh, Wenbans, Lightlands, Scrag Oak, Riverhall, Maplesden, Walland, Tidebrook. It is the Barhams I nominate, formerly the de Berehams, that vigorous and prolific family of ironmasters and milkmen; who*

*have 11 memorial slabs in the Church, although one has today been lost; built over perhaps. It is rumoured that de Bereham was one of William's Norman knights, so the eight centuries may be an understatement - it could be ten.*

*The 17th century historian Phillpot has sometimes recorded conjecture in his work which has been uncritically repeated by the College of Arms - who have to please their clients and have not always put historical accuracy before commercial considerations. These sources were later repeated by William Courthope [Rouge Pursuivant and later Somerset Herald] and were the stated source for the 'Story of Wadhurst'. Thus Rhys Davies and other popular writing about Wadhurst carry these errors still.*

*The Wadhurst History Society may consider that here is a subject - Wadhurst families of long standing - that would make an ideal project; **but anything we record should give details in full of the source and, unless it is a primary source, this too must be made clear.** Indeed another project could be to verify information recorded by Phillpot and other sources.*

*Brian Yates, Old Snape House, Wadhurst*

## Contributions from members

### George Barham of Snape

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the Snape Estate, still unspoiled, is virtually that which Sir George Barham conceived and built at the end of Queen Victoria's reign.

The earliest reference to Snape c.1200 is in the Battle Abbey cartulary recording the gift of 'all my lands of Snape in the parish of Wadehurst to the Abbot and Convent of Battle.' The Abbey owned Snape until the dissolution; then for almost three hundred years it was part of the Glynde Lands in the care of the Barham family. David Barham inherited the place in the 1590's whilst still a ward of his uncle, William Courthope of Whiligh. In 1617 he built a new house here and when his great grandson, also called David, sold Snape in 1721 it passed out of Barham ownership for some 160 years.

Robert Barham, a dairy farmer near Battle, had five sons; the youngest, also called Robert, born 1807, left the family home to start his own dairy shop in London at 272 Strand. In 1830 he married Altezera Henrietta Davey, and six years later their baby was born; they christened him George. Fifty years later he came here and built the present Snape Estate.

Robert and Altezera apprenticed him to a London cabinet maker but he delivered milk for them in the evenings. In 1858 he opened his own shop in Dean Street, employed others to do the deliveries and began to import milk by rail from outside London; he called his firm Express Dairies. Such was the quantity he brought in that it became necessary to organise transport to and from the trains, and to design special equipment for handling milk in bulk. The daily increase in business generated for the railway companies was so great that they had to extend their facilities, and build additional

sheds and sidings for Express.

Victorian London had little appreciation of the causes of infection; unclean habits were common in shops and in food production. Dairies diluted milk with water, used dirty containers, bound and thickened cream with slime derived from slugs and snails; this was not acceptable to George Barham. In 1868 he opened College Farm in Finsbury as a showplace for livestock and equipment, training his staff there and holding displays and exhibitions.

If it were not for his crusading spirit and his progressive social ideas he would have been just another very successful nineteenth century business man, but for over half a century he worked assiduously for the health of Londoners. He served on Government Committees and endeavoured to raise public awareness of the importance of cleanliness, supporting those working to improve drainage and purify the water supply.

Express Dairies and The Dairy Supply Company grew in influence and importance: milkmen to the people of London. The achievement was recognised; he held many appointments, including Lord Lieutenant of Middlesex and was knighted in 1904.

His family was native to this part of Sussex and he looked for a farm in the area. He bought Snape Farm in 1887 where the main buildings were the 1617 Farmhouse of David Barham and the much older Battle Abbey tithe barn. Shoemiths, Snape and Scrag Oak had been the houses of the Barham ironmasters. He felt he was returning home.

Sketches and notes on the architect's drawings dated between 1892 & 1903 indicate how he planned and developed the estate in several stages; his conception was remarkable, reflecting the experience he had acquired building Express depots, offices, dairies and tea-shops. Much of the work was carried out by his estate workers, the estate providing the materials. The gardens and terracing, the drives, ashlar stone walls, coach house, stables and the extensions of the house itself required immense quantities of sandstone and the main source was the quarry where the public footpath now comes through.

The house interior is of exceptional inventiveness and the highest craftsmanship, as is all the work here. When the central buildings were completed, he began to develop the paddocks and woods. There are seven monoliths in the 'Dimsel' lettered with the names of prominent members of the family and recording their achievements; one is dedicated to Queen Elizabeth's Sergeant at Arms, Nicholas Barham, and another to the author of 'The Ingoldsby Legends'. Snape Shaw and Snape Wood were planted with hornbeam and oak, paths and rides laid out, and footbridges made over the streams, a waterfall and two weirs were constructed with a hydraulic ram pumping water up to the house, all are still here; a brochure prepared for letting the Estate details some of this. The most notable letting which is known is that to the Romanovs, for three years from 1918 to 1920, when Natasha after fleeing Russia waited here for the Grand Duke Michael to join her and the children, but he was murdered before he

could escape.

However that was later; in the first decade of the century Sir George was busy building and making things including new choir stalls and pews for Wadhurst Church, where Barham ancestors are among those named on the thirty two cast iron grave slabs in the nave.

This 1910 photograph shows Sir George in a white suit standing at the southern end of the beautiful sunken garden built to complement the old Tithe Barn, his 'Baronial Hall'. Irish yews planted one each side of the gates in the north and south walls are now mature trees; in the photograph they appear as young trees



about eight feet high. He used local stone for the walls round the Barn but the gates and railings are from St Paul's Cathedral, the latter he purchased from St Paul's in 1896 for ten pounds; he also used them for the imposing semi-circular entrance he built at the top of the new north drive. Here the gates are supported by solid stone pillars each surmounted by a four foot high sculptured bear holding a shield bearing the Barham coat of arms. The gates themselves are fine examples of wrought iron work and were exhibited in the Great Exhibition of 1851. The St Paul's railings were the first to be made of cast iron; they were produced to the orders of Sir Christopher Wren by Gloucester Forge our most famous local ironworks, and now three centuries old are of considerable local and national importance.

In 1959 the distinguished architect Bernard Frankland Dark bought the Barn and converted it into a dwelling for himself and his family, preserving the garden and its original 1900 structure. The Barn is a listed building and the garden has now been registered by the County Gardens Trust.

Sir George was something of a Victorian Romantic; over the east porch of the Barn he put a painted sign, reading 'This Sussex Barn, Built by David Barham in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, was Restored to its present use by Sir George Barham in the reign of Queen Victoria'.

And inside the Barn above the massive fireplace, small gothic metal letters read 'Revile Not The Landmark Which The Fathers Have Set'.

© Brian Yates: Snape, February 2001

## Maurice and Shirley Wilson tell some tales of Woods Green

### A SAD TALE OF A LITTLE GIRL WHO WENT BLACKBERRYING

On the afternoon of 6th September, 1912 a little girl called Mabel Ann Maryan took a tin can and a stick and went blackberrying for her mother. She lived at No. 4 Woods Green with her parents and two brothers. We presume she walked down Wyck Lane to the bottom and over the fields towards Bartley Mill Road, on the top. On her journey she apparently met Albert Rumens, aged about 43, who lived next door but one to her at Woods Green and, according to him, he left her in Fullers Field and continued up to the road and then on to the Balaclava Inn.

Late that afternoon a Gamekeeper found little Mabel Ann, aged 10 years, lying dead at the spot where Rumens said he had left her. She had been suffocated and strangled with a handkerchief clutched in her left hand and one stuffed in her mouth. During the police investigation, the handkerchiefs were identified as belonging to Rumens, as according to his sister she had washed them previously for her brother and he did not own any more.

Rumens was detained and taken to Mark Cross, and later on he was convicted of Wilful Murder.

On the day of Mabel Ann's funeral, practically every blind was drawn at Woods Green, also at Sparrows Green as the little cortège passed through. The church was filled with a sad congregation, her mother being distraught throughout the service. A long list of Tokens of Sympathy was published in the Tunbridge Wells Advertiser dated 13th September, 1912, many from her little school friends at the Day School at Woods Green.

At this time we don't know the fate of Albert Rumens but hope to finalise this sad tale in the future.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF OAK COTTAGE, WOODS GREEN FORMERLY THE OAK STORES

As far as we know, the property was built about 1850 and there were originally four cottages, two rooms up and two rooms down with possibly a scullery at the back. No. 14 was used as a one room Ale House and was called The Oak. According to the 1871 Census it was run by a family called Botten. William Botten, aged 59, was described as a Beerhouse Keeper and he lived with his wife Elizabeth, aged 57, his grandson Frederick, aged 7, and a young couple called Martin: William aged 23, his wife Sarah, aged 22, and their

daughter Caroline, aged 1 year - they were described as Lodgers.

During the next 10 years The Oak must have prospered as, in the 1881 Census, the business was run by Robert Field, aged 25, described as a Grocer, and his wife Jane Field aged 25. There are no children listed.

We imagine that, as The Oak prospered as an Ale House/Grocery Store, the property was combined with No. 13 and the Ale House and back living room of No. 14 were turned into a larger Shop/Off Licence - the date of which is unknown.

The property was sold in 1921 through Smith & Co. of Lamberhurst to Daisy Bartlett: Shop and 2 cottages. This would confirm that the 2 cottages were converted into one between 1881 and 1921. In April, 1935 Daisy Petty (née Bartlett) sold to Mr Leonard R Sewell of Darbys Farm, Wadhurst: Shop and 2 cottages for £550.

During the second World War we understand the Shop was rented and run by a Mr Martin. Memories from older residents, now deceased, suggest that at some time beer was bottled on the premises using Oak Stores' own labels.

In September 1963, Maurice and Shirley Wilson purchased the Shop and Property from Mr L R Sewell: the Tenant at the time was Mr J W Penny. The Shop was not very well stocked but was built up gradually to sell Groceries, Greengroceries, Beer, Cider, Paraffin, Haberdashery, etc. (You name it, we sold it!) The business was well patronised by the local residents.

In 1971, as Supermarkets increased their size and availability and also due to the larger price increases created by the change to decimal coinage, the business became unviable and we therefore closed the Shop after many years of trading.

The Shop and Storeroom were incorporated into the rest of the accommodation and we are still in residence after 40 years enjoying the friendly hamlet of Woods Green.

An interesting point with regards to the Green at Woods Green where the residents have enjoyed the Millennium and Royal Celebrations with parties. In very recent years the Green has been registered Common Land and we understand that this is the only piece of registered Common Land in the Parish of Wadhurst.

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## BOOK REVIEW: 'The Kent and Sussex Weald'

This excellent book by Dr Peter Brandon, published in 2003 by Phillimore and available from Barnett's in the High Street at £25, covers the development of the Weald from primeval times to today; well illustrated and divided into comfortable length chapters [provided as all scholarly books should be with comprehensive indexing and reference to sources], the book is easy to read and informative. There is plenty to interest a resident of Wadhurst - and quotes will appear from time to time in this Newsletter!

p8: ..the English oak, for which the region was long celebrated...nicknamed the Sussex weed. For ships and buildings there was little other timber comparably so strong as Wealden oak, This exceptional quality was attributed to its growth in ferruginous clays. The scientific proof of this is still lacking, but John Hardcastle, a retired forester at Whiligh in Wadhurst, itself for centuries a famed nursery of oak, has implied its correctness with his assertion that the ferruginous Weald and Wadhurst Clay 'is to oak as mustard is to beef'.

## Note from the Editor

The next newsletter can be collected at the June meeting - if you have any material you would like included, please give it to any Committee member by 14 May or post it to The Editor, at Greenman Farm, Wadhurst TN5 6LE.

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## Q & A

This should be a regular feature of the Newsletter - the opportunity to resolve problems that have been bothering you for ages: so send in your queries and also the answers to earlier problems.

### Information Received

In the first newsletter, we asked for information on Valerie, Sylvia and Heather **TOPP** and the 1940 plane crash - or was it a bomb? Where? What happened?

Several members helped with an answer; Rosemary Pope sent in a report from the Daily Telegraph of 10 Nov 2003:

"Robert Ellet, 10, was one of the youngest to walk past the Cenotaph, in the company of the Gallantry Medallists League. Wearing his grandfather's medals, he was accompanied by his grandmother Rose Taylor, 81, who was awarded the George Medal for rescuing three children from a burning house in Wadhurst, Sussex, in 1940. It suffered a direct hit, but Mrs Taylor saved Valerie, Sylvia and Heather Topp."

And SYLVIA AND RICHARD MANNING 9 Ride Way Close Camberley Surrey sent a press cutting:

"My wife and I thank you for your help in digging out information about enemy action on September 27, 1940 at Buttons Farm, Wadhurst, when the home of Mr and Mrs George Topp suffered a direct hit from German bombers.

My wife Sylvia, then 2½, her sisters Valerie and Heather, who had been upstairs, had miraculous escapes, but their mother, Mrs Topp, and a family friend, Mrs Parfitt, were both instantly killed. The report says that Sylvia was blown through the wall onto the top of the great pile of wreckage in the garden. A jagged piece of wooden roof structure was protecting her when rescuers heard her cries in the darkness. She was only bruised and slightly scratched.

Mr George Topp, my wife's father, who in later years became landlord of the Boars Head, then the White Hart. Crowborough, was out on Home Guard duty at the time of the raid.

From this chilling story, however, a heroine emerged. Miss Rose Ede, the 17-year-old daughter of a farm worker, without a thought for herself and while bombs were still falling, rushed to the house. She crawled into the wreckage on her stomach and was heard to say "I can feel a foot". Then, using comforting words to a child beneath an oak beam, remained inside the debris until PC Clements and Special Constable Charles Bloomfield were able to lift the beam for Rose Ede to drag the child free. For this act of bravery Rose was awarded the George Medal.

Where is she now we wonder? Can any of your readers recall the incident and add information?

Here is an ironical footnote to a sombre story. Buttons Farm was located in an isolated part of Wadhurst. Mrs Parfitt, who was one of the victims, had only recently moved to Wadhurst to escape the bombings in Croydon."

Also more on Winnie Groves - a box containing press cuttings from local papers of weddings for which she made the wedding dress - has come to light. They will repay more detailed study but their flavour can be seen in this small sample, probably both from the 1930's:

**THE WEDDING** was solemnised at the Parish Church on Saturday of Miss Laura Mabel Goldsmith, only daughter of Mr William Goldsmith and the late Mrs Goldsmith, of 5 Laurel Gate Cottages, Wadhurst, and Mr Herbert Archibald Dalton, fifth son of Mrs Dalton, of Margate, and the late Mr H Dalton. The Rev E Mannering officiated and Mr Harold Rogers was best man. The bride, who was given away by her father, was dressed in floral voile, with hat to tone, and carried a bouquet of irises. She was attended by her friend, Miss Evelyn Pilbeam, who wore a pink silk dress with yellow picture hat and carried a basket of pink tulips. About 30 guests were entertained at Laurel Gate Cottages before the bride and bridegroom departed for their honeymoon at Caterham Valley. Presents were received as follows: Mr and Mrs G Pilbeam, blankets, sheets and counterpane; Mr and Mrs W Pilbeam, tablecloth and Treasury note; Mr and Mrs G Potten, bath towel; Mrs Strickland, afternoon tablecloth; Mr W H Newington, bedroom rug; Miss H Newington, duchesse set; Mr and Mrs O Corke, glass bowl; Mr and Mrs Clifton, afternoon tea-cloth; Mr and Mrs A Rogers, eiderdown; Mr H Rogers, three large towels; Mr C Rogers and Miss D Jeffrey, clock; Mrs A Walters, counterpane; Mrs J Pollington, bolster set; Mrs Gilbert, half-dozen tumblers; Miss Gilbert, tablecloth; Mrs Biddlecombe, set of jugs; Mr and Mrs Jennings, egg set; Mrs Saunders, pillow slips and cushion covers; Mrs Bovis, afternoon tablecloth; Mrs Sellens, jam and marmalade jars.

### WADHURST WEDDING—July 1937

The wedding took place at Wadhurst Parish Church on Saturday between Miss Mary Parks, second daughter of Mr and Mrs C Parks, of 5 Station View, Wadhurst, and Mr Frederick William Powell, only son of the late Mr F Powell and of Mrs Powell, of 1 Church-Street, Wadhurst.

The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a dress of white satin beaute, with veil held in place by a wreath of orange blossom, and her only ornament was a pearl necklace given her by the bridegroom. She was attended by Mrs A H Mitten (matron of honour), Misses Marjorie Parks (sister), Molly Davis (friend), Thelma Ackworth (bridegroom's cousin) and Jean Smith (friend). The bridesmaids' dresses were of lupin blue ring satin and the two elder ones wore head-dresses of silver leaves and carried pink and white sweet peas. The younger ones wore a spray of forget-me-nots and rosebuds and carried pink and white carnations. The matron of honour chose salmon pink satin, with fawn hat, and carried a bouquet of mauve sweet peas. She wore a pink crystal necklace and the bridesmaids blue crystal necklaces, the gift of the bridegroom. The bride's mother was in royal blue crepe marocain, with navy blue hat to tone.

Mr A H Mitten, bride's brother-in-law, was best man and the Rev D E Rice officiated. The choral service included the hymns "O Love Divine" and "Thine for ever".

Between 60 and 70 guests assembled at St George's Hall for the reception, after which Mr and Mrs Powell left for their honeymoon at Hastings. For travelling the bride wore a grey costume, with blue hat and navy blue shoes.

They don't write like that any more in The Courier—and we don't live that way either!

### Information Wanted

Kathleen Callow of 2 Alinora Drive, Goring-by-Sea, BN12 4LS has written:

"For some time my husband and I have been trying to locate the exact whereabouts of Sellens Cottage, Busses Green, Wadhurst. We believe it is, or was, near to Wickhurst Farm but on a visit to the area eighteen months ago we could not find it, despite asking some people in the area.

My husband's grandmother, Sarah Charlotte Rachel Couchman, was born in the cottage in September 1887, some seven months after her father David Couchman had died. She was the youngest of nine children, some of whom were born at Cousley Wood whilst the majority were born at Busses Green. Her mother, Mary-Ann Couchman (née Fuller) died in 1900 when Sarah was just thirteen. The family were in Cousley Wood at the time of the 1871 census but at Sellens Cottage for the 1881 and 1891 census."

If you can help, let Mrs Callow or The Editor know.

And Marian Prentice - Mayfield 01435 872 504 - is studying at Sussex University under Geoff Mead and would welcome any information on Long's Farm Mayfield for the period 1750 - 1950. Contact her direct if you can help.