

WADHURST HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER NO. 4 - SEP 2004

TERRIBLE TRAGEDY AT WADHURST WIDOW MURDERED—HER SON ARRESTED

Headlines from *The Kent and Sussex Courier* on the breakfast table on Friday 15 December 1905. The report continues: "On Monday morning in a tiny two-roomed cottage at Pook Pitt, which lies between Wadhurst and Cousley Wood, a widow was done to death under most brutal and horrifying circumstances. How it all happened will probably never be known, unless the murderer, in the depths of his remorse, chooses to confess. At present the bare facts of the case are few, but around them can be woven a long story of conjecture and assumption.

The victim of the tragedy was a woman commonly known in the district as Frances Stevens, a widow. Investigations which have been made since her death go to show that her rightful name was Frances Lee. She lived for some years with a man, named Stevens, and adopted his name. Of the second union there was one son, who was known as James Stevens. The husband, who had been an agricultural labourer, died many years ago, and the man, Stevens, was also said to be dead. The widow, whose age was 63 years, lived with her son, who is variously described as being between 21 and 25 years of age, and looks at least 25 years. They occupied a small habitation on the farm of Mr H. P. Lee, a well-known farmer in the district. It was a typical Sussex rural cottage standing in a situation of almost complete isolation. Passing through a little swing gate fronting the lane the door is reached along a broken pathway. It opens direct into the living room, a low-roofed place, with a large open

fireplace at one end. On the homely mantel-piece are a few ornaments, and about the walls cheap coloured pictures. A table in the centre, a bed chair, and two or three small chairs complete the furniture of the apartment. A bedroom is the only other part of the cottage, and it was here that the crime occurred.

As before stated, the victim lived with her son, who was employed on the farm, and just at the time was engaged in the normal winter work of wood-cutting. His mother was a respectable, hard-working, honest specimen of the agricultural working class, and had the reputation of being ready to toil as hard as any man. She earned her livelihood by charring, and such outdoor work as she was capable of accomplishing, and for some days before her death had been expected to start hop-pole "shaving".

The bedroom in which the tragedy occurred lends itself to little description. On each side was a bedstead, the two being divided by a rude partition formed of a curtain hung across the room. There was practically no other furniture in the room.

On Monday morning, about 8, the son James left the cottage with his dinner in a little basket, and went to work in a shaw three minutes walk from the cottage. Two of his mates, named Stapley and Dunk, had preceded him and were at work cutting wood. A brief greeting was made by the three men, and then they went on working in the silent mood characteristic of those whose occupation is on the soil. Scarcely a word was spoken until noon

(Continued on page 7)

The Committee

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Meeting Schedule

Commemoration Hall—19:30 for 20:00

Wed 15 Sep	Pat Wright The Medieval Life Style
Fri 15 Oct	Elizabeth Hughes Churchyards—and what they can tell us
Wed 17 Nov	Jeremy Hodgkinson Wealden Iron Industry
Wed 8 Dec	AGM - members' talks and social

Next year's programme is nearly complete—advance warning now of meeting dates—all in the Wadhurst Commemoration Hall and all on Wednesdays:

5 January	9 February	2 March
6 April	27 April	1 June

6 July to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of WW 2 and the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Aubers Ridge

28 September	2 November	7 December
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Prior bookings for many Tuesdays and Thursdays and Drama Club shows have made it impossible to get a more regular booking for the History Society monthly meetings.

Forthcoming Events

Saturday 2 October and Sunday 3 October—the Bocking Collection in the Commemoration Hall: 10:00 - 16:00

Saturday 9 October—Another chance to see 'Adventures in the Hopfields' in Rotherfield Village Hall at 19:30

Saturday 30 October—Local History Fair at the Meridian Hall, East Court, College Lane, East Grinstead. 10:00 to 16:30 with 15 or so local societies exhibiting.

Thursday 11 November—Lecture Lunch at Bateman's : Heather Woodward on 'Life in the Nursery and School-room'. £16—Booking essential on 01435 882 302.

Saturday 20 November—'The Magpie' in the Great Hall at Ightham Mote. A performance by Kate Glasscock about the women in Henry VIII's life—not to be missed! 11:00 Coffee, 11:30 the play staged in the Great Hall, 13:00 two-course lunch. £16 [adult members of the National Trust]

Notes on Society Activities

On June 12, the owners of Wadhurst Park organised a talk, in conjunction with the Society and St John's Church Tidebrook, by Dr Sigrid Kahle about the family she had married into, who had lived in the old Wadhurst Park after the last war. The talk was followed by a splendid party with drinks and canapés—and the opportunity to enjoy the stunning interior of the house and its gardens. Our sincere thanks to our hosts; £530 was raised for Hospice in the Weald—and we now have a DVD of the event, which members may borrow.

On 13 June, 38 people boarded a coach driven by our very own Neil Rose for our first Society outing—to the Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton. We made good time and met up with the Goultons with their three legged dog in the car park. So, 40 of us—one on crutches—plus dog, split into two groups and followed our respective guides.

I am sure each of us learnt and retained something new that our guide told us about where the properties had come from, something about their construction or indeed social history attached to the building being studied.

ITV were filming in the Market Square for a history series to be shown in the autumn on the Black Death, so we watched several 'takes' of mediaeval peasants running with a covered stretcher whilst a crew-hand pumped bellows which wafted the required smoke to 'cleanse' the area! After lunch the group had a few hours to wander at leisure or just sit and stare.

Possibly the highlight was the guided visit in the afternoon around the first timber gridshell building in the UK and a relatively new addition at Singleton. This structure houses the Museum's conservation work and rural artefacts. Classes are also held there on different aspects of countryside skills, not least in lath and plaster construction.

We returned home in the early evening safe and sound—but, Neil: your coach sounded really dodgy as it graunched away from Uplands after our long trip! *RR*

On Tuesday 15 June, Gwen Jones gave us a talk on 'The Hop Industry in Kent and Sussex'. A summary of this will appear in the next newsletter, which will also contain a report on this season's hop harvest after the Society visit to Little Scotney Farm.

Sunday 1 August found 66 members at Greenman Farm for another first for the Society, a barbecue fundraiser.

After much planning and many phone calls, the array of salads and puddings arrived—and we thank each member who so generously produced such fare. Thanks also go to the cake and produce providers and indeed to those who provided all the wonderful raffle prizes. Michael took five groups around the farmhouse—I am still not sure whether he actually had any lunch [*he didn't*]. It was a real taster of a mediaeval building that had seen many changes over the centuries but was still a family home. Now consisting of three bays and a 'modern' extension, the house originally had a fourth bay at the east end, which collapsed when the main posts rotted away. David Martin has dated the main structure to around 1480 on the basis of its construction.

Finally special thanks must go to John Lamplugh, Philip Meredith and Jeremy Oldershaw for really "sweating" for us all over the cooking on what really must have been one of the hottest days of all. Also to Bryan Bell parking supremo and to Claire and Michael for opening their home—and to all those whose hard work in preparation, cooking, serving—and clearing up—made for a really successful day—raising £485 in all. *RR*

Recent Acquisitions

We have been given by Chris Wilson a copy of a CD, containing some 300 images of old postcards of Wadhurst—some well known but others much rarer. We need to consider how best to use this exciting resource.

And Brian Harwood—author of 'The High Weald in Old Photographs'—has given us his copy of the manuscript volume on Wadhurst, prepared by William Courthope. Parts of this are accessible on microfilm in the East Sussex Record Office—and the whole can be consulted at the College of Arms in London: but a complete photocopy of his notes on Wadhurst is another wonderful resource for the Society.

and loss

The sad death of Charles Wilkinson at the end of August has taken away not only a good friend to many of us in Wadhurst but also an irreplaceable source of knowledge about the history of Wadhurst, its shops and its houses gained from his work here as our local country solicitor. His memory was remarkable and had already been used to great advantage by the Development of Wadhurst task group. He will be greatly missed by his family, his friends and by the Wadhurst History Society.

WADHURST PARK—continued

The Drewes

In June 1898 Wadhurst Park was sold to Mr Julius C Drew (changed to Drewe in 1913), who had started his working life as a tea buyer in China. He opened his first shop in Liverpool in 1878; in 1883 he moved to London. The business developed rapidly under the name of "The Home and Colonial Stores". After only six years he and his partner John Musker were able to retire from active participation in the firm as rich men. Drewe was only thirty-three years old. In 1890 he bought Culverden Castle in Tunbridge Wells, on which site the Kent and Sussex Hospital now stands, and at that time married Frances Richardson. Already by 1900 he was listed as Drew of Wadhurst Hall in *Burke's Landed Gentry*.

Julius Drewe bought Wadhurst Park lock, stock and barrel. He paid £47,850 for the whole estate; it was described in the sales contract as the "Manor of Combe or Coombes and its lands, the Mansion House known as Wadhurst Hall, together with the Park, Lake, Gardens, Pleasure Grounds, Stabling and Outbuildings and the land in the Parishes of Wadhurst, Mayfield and Ticehurst, known as the Wadhurst Park Estate". Mr Drewe added new land to the estate and put in central heating and electricity from a turbine by the lake. He then moved into his new home with his young wife and three sons, Adrian, Basil and Cedric, born between 1891 and 1896. The first born was named after Adriano de Murrieta.

Two daughters, Mary and Frances, were born at Wadhurst Hall. Life there seems to have been blissfully happy. Frances has given an account of her childhood, which reads like a fairytale; the sweet, kind parents with their five children, surrounded by friendly, devoted servants in the most comfortable and beautiful setting. She mentions many of the servants by name: Mr Waite, the butler, with his marvellous mutton-chop whiskers and his wife who made dresses; Mrs Stacey, the housekeeper, busy by the sewing machine in her work room; Mrs Chandler, the cook, who was chef-trained; the much-loved nanny Bernie Rickwood, nicknamed Bop; the second nanny Mary Jane Sharpe and the nursery maid Eliza Winch, who lived with her parents in Stream Cottages by the Miners Arms. Eliza's

husband worked in the kitchen garden. Her father prepared kindling wood in the cellar of Wadhurst Hall. There were White, the estate carpenter; Barnes, the sweeper of the front drive; Hutton and later on Grant, the coachmen; Mrs Bradshaw, the head laundress, married to the previous estate carpenter. There were the two drivers, Holter and Nethercot; Mr and Mrs Dunk - Mr Dunk nursing the Drewe boys when they got the measles, Mrs Dunk cooking for the unmarried men living in the Bothy. There was Mr Crawford at Scrag Oak, the estate agent, who every Christmas handed out turkeys and geese to the people working at Wadhurst Park. There were the under-keepers, Wickens and Everett; the latter reared the ducks at Doozes Farm. There was the charming Irish governess, Miss Jennie Griffith, known as Griff, and the Chaplain Leslie Stevenson at Sunset Lodge. He later became vicar of Wadhurst, then Canon and Dean of Waterford Cathedral. In the Entrance Lodge lived the Friend family, and at the Octagon Lodge by the back drive lived the Necklins. Mr Friend and Mr Necklin both served as night-watchmen.

The main drive was flanked by glaucous cedars planted by the Murrietas. The Hall, still with the Spanish furniture, smelled of bees' wax polish. The floors were covered by carpets from Donegal which Mr Drewe had ordered when he bought the house. Morning prayers with all the staff were held in the dining-room. The family had many clergymen among their friends, Mr Drewe being the son of an evangelical clergyman himself. Sunday service was always in the Chapel; Mr Drewe taught Sunday-school to the senior boys, his daughter Mary to the smaller children. Elaborate Christmas tree parties were held in the riding school for all the people working on the estate, with heaps of presents and a huge tea to follow. In the summer there were garden parties with pastoral plays and tea in marquees. There were shooting parties every Saturday during the season with enormous bags of ducks and pheasants, followed by tea in the hall, alternating with dinner parties with the children kneeling in the gallery to catch a glimpse of their beautiful mother going in to dinner. Occasionally balls took place in the huge Oakroom, where the orchestra sat comfortably playing in the ingle-nook. In the summer, lunches were served on the terrace with screens to keep out the draught and light shades to keep out the sun.

Julius Drewe did a great deal of charitable work. He started a Clubroom in what is now Mayhurst, and a book club for young unmarried men. He also supported for many years a Dr Packard, who was a medical man and a clergyman as well, who had his surgery in Shoreditch in the East End of London.

All the Drewe children played musical instruments, and their mother played the piano. Every Sunday evening the family sang hymns together. There was plenty of sport. Wadhurst Park had its own cricket and football teams. There were both lawn tennis and ordinary tennis, croquet, ice skating in the winter, roller-skating in the riding school and riding. The children had their own ponies, a donkey, a monkey and many other pets. There were the kennels with spaniels, setters, pointers and retrievers; there was fishing in the lake and Saturday afternoon shooting with father.

The gardens were a source of joy, fruit and flower gardens beyond the conservatory, vegetable gardens by Sunset Lodge and a marvellous rose garden beneath the terraces. The rose garden was Mrs Drewe's favourite place. The children were sent to choose roses for the male guests, to wear in their button holes for dinner, and during summer the kind Mrs Drewe used to send baskets of roses to her sons at Eton.

Mr Drewe liked modern comforts. Wadhurst Hall had central heating, electricity, an estate telephone and several cars among them two Rolls Royces with fur-lined rugs and foot-warmers.

The Drewes were a close-knit family. House guests were mainly relatives, clergymen and business acquaintances. But business was never mentioned. Mr Drewe had amassed a great fortune, and he was satisfied that he had done so in an honest way.

Daily life was comfortable and leisurely. Both Mr and Mrs Drewe were slow eaters and the meals were lengthy with handwritten menus. Nothing was left to chance. Mrs Drewe always inspected the guest-rooms herself before visitors arrived. Mr Drewe attended to estate matters in the morning, using the telephone in his dressing room. He read his evening newspaper, fetched for him at the railway station by a boy with a pony and trap. He went for walks, fished in the lake, did some shooting and went to Scotland, and later to Torquay, for his holidays.

A complementary account of life at Wadhurst Park has been given by Mr Leonard Pierce, the secretary of Goudhurst and Kildown Local History Society. Mr Pierce's father came to Wadhurst Hall as a single gardener, married and was given a cottage on the estate, where a daughter and two sons were born. Like Frances Drewe, Leonard Pierce remembers his childhood as a golden age, where Wadhurst Hall was the centre of the universe and Mr Drewe its benevolent master. Some of the people mentioned by Frances Drewe were also important to him. Old Granny Necklin in the Octagon Lodge and the Friend family in the Entrance Lodge; Mr Dunk, who not only looked after the Drewe boys when they were ill but was also in charge of hundreds of hens. The Dunks lived in a cottage called Glenhurst attached to the Clubroom (Mayhurst).

The cricket field and football pitch were on either side of Button's Drive and, after matches, the teams resorted to the Clubroom in Mayhurst, with its entrance maxim 'Manners Makyth Man'. Wadhurst Hall had not only a football team, it also had its own football song, composed by one of the keepers.

On the ball Wadhurst Hall
Never mind the danger
Rush it in and score a goal
Play just like a ranger.
Mark your man and tackle fair
Keep well on the ball
A jolly lot of lads are they
Who play for Wadhurst Hall.

During the 1914-18 war Wadhurst Hall had its own squad of uniformed volunteers, jocularly known as "The Nanny Goat Lancers". The Pierce children went to school in Tidebrook, a two mile walk from Wadhurst Hall. They were joined on their way to school by Mary Maylam, whose parents farmed Lodge Hill, together with their two sons. The children often went to the laundry along the road to the kennels. The laundry was warm and inviting in cold weather. Three or four girls worked there, washing and ironing for the Hall. When the Drewes went to Torquay in the summer, the laundry maids went with them. During the absence of the Drewes the lake was there for the children on the estate to explore. A barge moored by the boat-house was ideal as a bathing platform. At the end of the lake was the Tea House, a wooden chalet type of building, where lunches were served during the shoots. Mr Darkins, the head keeper, allotted each guest a boy who carried his cartridge bag for the day. The beating was done by the men on the

estate. The game was hung in the game larder, a louvered building near the kennels. It still stands within the freehold of the Hunting Lodge (formerly Maywood and before that Rose Cottage). During the Murrieta time an ice house in a bank near the Hall was used.

Christmas was a great time enjoyed by all with Christmas dinner provided by Mr Drewe. On Boxing Day the Wadhurst Town Band came to play carols, first at the front door for the gentry and then at the back door for the staff. Then came the great party in the riding school, described also by Miss Frances. The family and the staff rendered songs and recitations.

After leaving school, Leonard Pierce was taken on as a garden boy. He then lived with his parents in Chevincote, now held freehold for more than 40 years by Mr and Mrs Winchester. Around the cottage was the fruit garden. In front of the house across the road were the pleasure grounds, flower borders with box hedges, long glass houses and the great conservatory with palms and ferns.

From the Working Album of Nathaniel Hitch—sculptor: design for the chimneypiece in the Great Hall of Wadhurst Hall [photo from the Henry Moore Institute Archive, Liverpool]. The History Society was recently asked for help in explaining the connection with the de Murrieta family.



On the other side of the conservatory was the terrace, covered with fine beach pebbles that needed constant raking to keep it looking nice. Sheep were on loan from the house farm (Flattenden) to keep the grass down by the drive near the house and Leonard was there to herd them off the borders round the drive.

At the annual ball he was employed to guide the chauffeurs to the garage yard, when they had deposited their charges at the front door.

His most important job, though, was in the Chapel, where he rang the chapel bell for service every Sunday. His mother played the organ and he acted as a verger, getting the key early on Sunday morning from the key rack in the butler's pantry. Once a quarter he presented himself at the estate agents with an account which read, "Due to Leonard Pierce for church work, Thirteen Shillings".

He was christened by the aforementioned Dr Packard from Shoreditch and instructed for confirmation by Mr Turnbull, who came up from Bexhill for the weekends staying at Sunset Lodge, where Mr Waite, the butler, now lived. Sunset Lodge later became the property of Sir Willis Combs. Mr Pierce senior then took a job as head gardener in Tunbridge Wells, and so young Leonard's carefree, happy life at Wadhurst Hall came to an abrupt end!

The Drewe's eldest son Adrian died during the First World War. He served in the army like his two younger brothers. His death was a terrible loss and Mr Drewe never fully recovered from the shock. He had by then already lost interest in Wadhurst Park, a place bought ready-made and although beautiful and agreeable not in any sense his

creation. Early on he had left his business in the hands of others and in 1919 he and his partner sold the outstanding shares for £1 million, a huge sum in those days.

With his elder brother William he had always taken a keen interest in the history of the Drewe family. A genealogist convinced him that his family was descended from the Drewes of Broadhembury near Honiton in Devon. Already in 1901 he bought land there and installed his brother William, a barrister of the Inner Temple, at Broadhembury House. Their first cousin Richard Peek was the rector of Drewsteighton, named after Drogo de Teigne, and alleged forefather to the Drewes. Julius stayed on several occasions with his cousin and it must have been here that he conceived the idea of building a castle on the home ground of his ancestor. He found an ideal site, and in 1910 he bought about 450 acres south and west of the village. (By the time of his death in 1931 he had bought up an estate of 1,500 acres). He then went to Edwin Lutyens, the most interesting architect of the time, and asked him to build his castle. According to his son Basil, he did so on the advice of William Hudson, proprietor of *Country Life*, who was both a patron and a champion of Lutyens.

Drewe was now 54 years old, but he still had time and energy and money to create his new family seat. On April 4, 1911, a foundation stone was laid. Castle Drogo was finally completed in 1930, a year before Drewe died. In 1927 the furniture, mainly the Murrietas' Spanish pieces, was brought down from Wadhurst Hall.

Mrs Drewe and her son Basil continued to live at Castle Drogo. During 1939-45, Mrs Drewe and her daughter Mary ran the house as a home for babies made homeless during the bombings of London.

Mrs Drewe died in 1954 and Basil Drewe was then joined at Drogo by his son Anthony and his wife. Anthony and his son, Dr Christopher Drewe, later gave Castle Drogo and 600 acres of the surrounding land to the National Trust.

The last part of this history will appear in the December Newsletter

The Kahles of Wadhurst Hall

Professor Paul Kahle, an East Prussian of the old school, moved to Wadhurst Hall in 1948 and lived there with his family for a couple of years. On June 12 2004, his daughter-in-law Dr Sigrid Kahle, in the new Wadhurst Hall, talked about this remarkable family.

Paul Kahle was an expert in Hebrew bible texts at the University in Bonn before the war; as a result he had many Jewish doctorate students even after the passage of the Nuremburg Laws in 1935. His wife Marie was also an intellectual and opposed to the Nazi regime: her children were not allowed to join the Hitler Youth. Kristalnacht on 10 November 1938 was a turning point for the family.

The eldest son—rashly perhaps—helped a Jewish shop-keeper tidy up her corset shop; as a result he and his mother came to the attention of the Nazi police. The local newspaper ran an article against Frau Kahle and her son; their windows were smashed and 'Here lives a friend of the Jews' daubed on the pavement. Paul Kahle—then aged 63—was forbidden access to the University and posters appeared with gallows on.

They were advised that there were only two ways out—divorce or suicide. But Frau Kahle, a devout Catholic, decided that escape from Germany was the only answer. She managed to take her eldest son to Holland 'on an Easter holiday'; she then telephoned her husband and

managed to persuade him to leave everything and join her. She wrote to her second son John in Italy, telling him not to go back to Germany. The remaining three boys somehow managed to obtain passports and persuade the British Consulate in Bonn to issue visas; they crossed the border on 31 Mar and on 1 April the law was changed: no German child could leave the Reich unless already a member of the Hitler Youth.

Arriving in England, the family moved to Cambridge, where Paul Kahle knew many Jewish scholars. But he was not Jewish and financial help was hard to find; housed in Lawrence of Arabia's home, he was offered a job by Chester Beatty cataloguing his oriental library. He moved to Oxford, where he also got work from the Bodleian; the family moved to 27 Mortlake Road, close to Kew Gardens.

With five boys to educate and little money, and deprived of their German citizenship and access to any resources left behind in Germany, the family struggled. William had a music scholarship—and worked in a grocer's shop; John won an Oxford scholarship in oriental languages at St Catherine's. Theo went to the nearby polytechnic, Paul secured a place at Kingston Grammar and Ernst went to school in Sheffield. Then on 25 June 1940 the three eldest boys were arrested and sent to Canada, fortunately not on the *Andora Star*; after 11 months, Marie secured their release and, after a further three months interned in the Isle of Man, the family was re-united.

Marie and the boys lived through the Blitz in Kew and wrote to Paul every week: all these letters remain with the family. She identified totally with England and considered offers to leave for America—but her health failed. By 1947 the boys ran the household; Paul received some financial compensation from Germany and the family moved into central London, where Sigrid Kahle, who had come to Oxford, with her father, met the family and stayed with them—in chaos—for six months.

Recommended by their doctor to move to the country for the sake of Marie Kahle's health, the family took a lease on Wadhurst Hall. Sigrid Kahle remembers the large oak-panelled hall with its enormous oak table, 50 empty rooms, 9 cows and a milking machine, 50 chickens, 2 Alsatians and a goose. Then came a phone call from Tilbury Docks, announcing the arrival of 8 tons of books—Paul Kahle's library from Bonn. Bookshelves were hastily constructed and the library arrived at Wadhurst Hall.

Marie's health continued to decline. She had her bedroom in the ballroom and loved Wadhurst Hall: she felt all the sacrifices had been worthwhile but died on 18 December 1948 and is remembered in Tidebrook Churchyard [with her sons Theodor, William and Ernst-Friedrich].

The family tried to buy Wadhurst Hall but were unable to get a mortgage, so they had to leave. William became a Catholic priest—having suffered most in Germany, he remained in England at Westminster Cathedral and as chaplain to Pentonville and Holloway prisons. John returned to Bonn, joining the German Foreign Service. Theo tried a business career in Germany but moved to California as a bookbinder; Paul died young aged 32. Ernest returned to study in Germany: he then went to South Africa, where he trained black Africans as managers for the insurance industry; he was a member of the ANC and gave Nelson Mandela a floor in his office. He died in a motor accident. Professor Kahle returned to Dusseldorf in 1963 and died in Bonn in September 1964 aged 89.

All in all a remarkable family, a fascinating talk by a remarkable speaker and a delightful evening for the Society. *MJH*

THE BATTLE OF AUBERS RIDGE 9 May 1915

The talk at the May 2004 meeting of the Society concentrated on that part of the battle in which Wadhurst lost so many of its men. The wider scene has been set out in *VCs of the First World War - The Western Front 1915* by Peter Batchelor and Christopher Matson [Sutton Publishing 1997] pps 92-109:

"Sir Douglas Haig planned to attack both north and south of Neuve Chapelle after a forty minute artillery bombardment. The southern attack was to be carried out by 1st and Meerut Divs between Chocolat Menier Corner and Port Arthur, with the Meerut Div. swinging north-east to take the *Stützpunkte* at La Cliqueterie Farm. The northern attack by the 8th Div. was to advance south-east towards Rouges Bancs and then secure a line from Rouges Bancs to Fromelles and along the Aubers Ridge where its right would join up with the Meerut Div. The attack was originally planned to begin on 8 May but was delayed to the 9th so as to act in concert with a large attack by the French in Artois.

The Germans had been quick to learn from their experiences at Neuve Chapelle in March and had strengthened their defences: front breastworks were increased in width to at least 15 feet and to a height of more than 6 feet; wire defences increased to a depth of 15 yards, some of which lay in sunken areas immediately in front of the breastworks and could not be easily seen from the British lines; sandbags of different colours disguised the position of the numerous machine-gun emplacements built into the breastworks, with guns just above ground level; and the number of German troops in both front and support lines was increased.

The British artillery bombardment began at 05:00 hours and was followed thirty minutes later by the forward companies who climbed over the British parapets and assembled 80 yards from the German line in accordance with orders. Many of these men were very quickly shot down by rifle fire and machine-gun fire as the enemy troops holding the front breastworks were, in the main, not severely affected by the artillery fire. The Germans were expecting an attack and had possibly been alerted by the destruction of a large chimney in the Rue du Bois the previous day to give British artillery an improved field of fire.

The main British assault began at 05:40 hours but few companies reached the enemy front line, except where two mines had been exploded on the left of the line in the northern sector. Because of the largely undamaged state of the enemy breastworks, further attempts that day to cross no-man's-land resulted in severe casualties to the attacking troops. Those men who did reach the German lines were quickly attacked by the defenders. With no support able to reach them, those who remained were withdrawn after dark and further attacks were called off in the evening.

Although the British artillery bombardment on the German front defences looked effective—one eye-witness described the German lines as a 'long sheet of flame and bursting shells' - much of the wire was not cut and insufficient heavy artillery shells hit the breastworks. Some shells fell as far as 400 yards behind the German line. The British counter-battery bombardment was also not effective as the enemy was able to shell both the front and assembly positions.

Casualties on the British side totalled over 10,800, while the estimated German losses were 1,500. A special order issued by Haig on the day after the battle stated that the attack had 'proved of great assistance to our allies', which

suggested the British assault had caused the Germans to move reinforcements away from the French attack near Vimy. German accounts, however, do not bear out this statement."

In this desperate battle, in which Wadhurst lost so many men, four men came out of the disaster with awards of the Victoria Cross.

Citations below are from The Victoria Cross Reference website <http://www.victoriacross.net/>

Cpl James Upton, 1st Sherwood Foresters (Notts & Derby Regt) : On 9 May 1915 at Rouges Bancs, France, [on the east flank of the battle] Corporal Upton displayed great courage all day in rescuing the wounded while exposed to very heavy rifle and artillery fire, going close to the enemy's parapet regardless of his own safety. One wounded man was killed by a shell while the corporal was carrying him. When not actually carrying the wounded he was engaged in dressing and bandaging the serious cases in front of our parapet.

No. 7942, A/Cpl Charles Sharpe 2nd Bn Lincolnshire Regt: On 9 May 1915 at Rouges Bancs, France, Corporal Sharpe was in charge of a blocking party sent forward to take a portion of the German trench. He was the first to reach the enemy's position and using bombs with great effect he himself cleared them out of a trench 50 yards long. By this time all his party had fallen and he was then joined by four other men with whom he attacked the enemy with bombs and captured a further trench 250 yards long.

A/Cpl David Finlay, 1st Black Watch: On 9 May 1915 near Rue du Bois, France [on the west flank of the battle], Lance-Corporal Finlay led a bombing party of 12 men in the attack until 10 of them had fallen. He then ordered the two survivors to crawl back and he himself went to the assistance of a wounded man and carried him over a distance of 10 yards of fire-swept ground into cover, quite regardless of his own safety.

No. 2832 Cpl Ripley 1st Bn Black Watch: On 9 May 1915 at Rue du Bois, France, Corporal Ripley led his section on the right of the platoon in the assault and was the first man of the battalion to climb the enemy's parapet. From there he directed those following him to the gaps in the German wire entanglements. He then led his section through a breach in the parapet to a second line of trench. With seven or eight men he established himself, blocking other flanks, and continued to hold the position until all his men had fallen and he himself was badly wounded in the head.

THE BATTLE OF FESTUBERT 15-27 May

"Following the Battle of Aubers Ridge Sir John French was put under considerable pressure by the French to mount a further offensive and the action that was later to be known as the Battle of Festubert was proposed by Sir Douglas Haig on 12 May.

The broad details were not dissimilar to the attack of 9 May but on this occasion the distance between the two parts of the pincer movement were much closer. The 7th Div. would attack north of Festubert while 600 yards to the north the 2nd and Meerut Divs would attack from just north of Chocolat Menier Corner to Port Arthur. The objectives of this new attack, much curtailed from that of 9 May, were now to be an advance of some 1,000 yards along La Quinque Rue from north-west of Festubert to la Tourelle.

As the northern sector was over ground which had previously been attacked, it was proposed that this part of the action should be at night, followed by a daylight attack by the 7th Div. French attacks had achieved more success with a longer artillery bombardment so it was agreed that a 36 hour bombardment would precede the attack. The artillery began firing on the morning of 13 May and

continued in a deliberate fashion with shots being observed and reported. A number of howitzer shells did not explode, possibly owing to faulty fuses. Rain fell throughout 13 May, making observation difficult, and it was considered necessary to extend the bombardment to 60 hours.

The attack of 2nd and Meerut Divs began at 23:30 hours on 15 May and the forward battalions of 6th Bde (2nd Div.) were successful in their surprise attack and occupied the German support trench. To the left 5th Bde (2nd Div.) and Garhwals Bde (Meerut Div.) were caught by rifle and machine-gun fire in no-man's-land and few men reached the German front line.

At dawn on 16 May 20th Bde of 2nd Div. advanced; 22nd Bde managed an advance of about 600 yards but 20th Bde was halted by enfilade fire from a strong enemy position to the left and only the right section of the brigade went forward past the German front line.

During the night of 16/17 May the Germans started a withdrawal of about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to a new line from South Breastwork to Ferme du Bois, but the British were not aware of this withdrawal for a number of days.

On 17 May the gap between the 7th and 2nd Divs in the enemy front line was joined. Various attacks were made during the period 18-24 May which resulted in some small gains. On 18 May the 7th Div. was relieved by the Canadian Div., and the 2nd Div. by the 51st Div. on 19 May. On 25 May the Canadian Div., with 47 Div. on its right, attacked and gained some ground east of Festubert. The overall gains from the battle were about 600 yards on a front of 4,000 yards. British casualties exceeded 16,600,

TERRIBLE TRAGEDY AT WADHURST [CONT]

when Stevens remarked that he had expected his mother to come down to the wood to do some hop-pole "shaving". As she had not been down, he said he would go up to ascertain the reason. He went off for three or four minutes, and then came rushing back to his companions exclaiming excitedly, "Some one has murdered her." They thought the young fellow was playing some ghastly joke, and refused to believe the grim news. His earnestness convinced them, however, that something was wrong, and they consented to go up to the cottage. Silently they walked across the field apprehensive of impending evil, and entering the door of the humble abode turned into the bedroom. Here a fearful scene presented itself to them, which almost paralysed their senses. Lying across the bed was the body of Mrs Stevens, still and quiet, the sightless eyes glazed in death. A ghastly, gaping wound had been inflicted in the throat, from which the life-blood had gushed with great force, splashed upon the wall opposite, and soaked through and through the bed-clothes, dyeing them a deep brown hue. There was no need to examine for traces of life, which had long since gone, and the three moved quietly away from the terrible scene, and left the house of death. Soon the village constable was brought, and the medical men came and made a further examination. From the result of their investigation, combined with a little imagination, the story may be told. It was apparent that Mrs Stevens had been up some time when she met her death. Her own bed was made, but not that of her son, and other household duties had been fulfilled. It was clear that she was attacked without any previous warning, and brutally killed without being able to make an attempt to save her life. There were absolutely no traces of a struggle, which lends colour to the idea that the murderer did his devilish work quickly, and only too successfully. That it could have

been anything else but murder is impossible. Such a wound could not have been self-inflicted, and moreover no weapon of any sort calculated to have made such a horrible severance has been discovered. Drs. Fazan and Rashleigh have made a minute examination of the remains and the room, and at the proper time will no doubt offer theories as to how it all happened. At the present time there is ample material to form conclusions as to how the murderer did his evil work. Apparently he left the bedroom after the commission of the crime with his hands dripping with blood. As he pawed the table in the living room, blood dripped from his guilty hands on to it. Reaching the scullery he carefully washed his hands clean in a bowl of water, leaving the blood-stained water in the bowl. He then dried his hands upon two towels leaving faint marks of blood upon them. That this all happened is perfectly clear. What he did with his weapon cannot yet be ascertained. Outside the cottage is a small pond, into which he may have thrown it. In the scullery a razor was found in a basket. It belonged to the son but bore no marks of blood upon it, or of having been washed. It is, moreover, inconceivable that the blade of a razor could be used in a way which the weapon must have been, and yet bear no traces of violent usage on its blade. It was more likely to have been a much heavier instrument, possibly a large clasp knife with a hooked point. In the bedroom close to the door P.C. Keep found a coloured handkerchief greatly blood-stained, and this may prove of some importance in elucidating the mystery.



THE SCENE OF THE TRAGEDY.

Naturally, the East Sussex police in the neighbourhood took every possible means to lay the murderer by the heels. Under Superintendent Criddle, of Uckfield, they made exhaustive enquiries. There was the usual crop of stories as to a strange man having been seen in the district during the day.

On Tuesday afternoon there was a sensational development in the case when the son, James Stevens, was arrested by P.C. Anscombe, and conveyed to Mark Cross Police Station. When it was made known to him that he would be charged with the fearful crime of murdering his mother he made no answer. He was formally charged on Wednesday at Mark Cross Police Court, and the same afternoon the Inquest was opened before Mr G. Vere Benson. Stevens was given the opportunity to be present, but declined to do so. Some progress was made with the evidence, and the Inquest was adjourned for a week.

[to be continued in the December Newsletter]

Thanks to Maurice Wilson for details of this second Woods Green murder!

P.C. Keep had a busy week: Albert Watts of the Cock Robin, Wadhurst, was summoned for allowing his vehicle on the highway without a lighted lamp. P.C. Keep said defendant left his cart outside a cottage at 5.20 p.m. without a light. Defendant pleaded guilty, and was fined 2s 6d and 5s costs

Note from the Editor

The December newsletter will be available at the meeting on Dec 8. Articles and material for inclusion should be given to any Committee member, or to The Editor, at Greenman Farm, Wadhurst TN5 6LE or e-mail whs@greenman.demon.co.uk by 14 November please.

TASK GROUP REPORTS

A general meeting was held on 6 July to discuss progress. Conclusions were:

1. there was a lack of focus in the current programme of studies
2. this could be improved if a clear project was defined for the next 6–9 months
3. it had to be remembered that there was a limit to the amount of time individuals either could or were prepared to put into research
4. Oral History [OH] was, in a sense, a stand alone activity - but one which would throw up information of value to all areas; it was vital that the transcription problem was solved urgently
5. concentrating on a defined period of time and a more limited area would be a sensible way ahead - but IA should not be constrained by geography

It was therefore decided that the first project for the Society should be a study of the development of the Victorian High Street—from west of Hill House east to the site of the Lower Toll Gate; the area should include the Church to the north and the old Mill to the South. The December meeting of the Society would be used to report on progress and the ultimate objective should be a full written report on the project.

Since then the summer—so called—has intervened and only some progress made. Contacts—for those who would like to join in:

Development of Wadhurst [DW]:

Rachel Ring 783 455

Estates & Buildings [EB]:

Bryan Bell 782 845 Val Tunbridge 782 498

Family History [FH]:

Emma Richardson 01580 860 395—transcribing the inscriptions in the churchyard is nearly complete

Industry and Agriculture [IA]:

Martin Turner 783 803—has been busy with group meetings and productive debate

Oral History [OH]: Heather Woodward 783 212—interviews continue but the transcription problem remains. If any member has a PC with a sound capability and would be willing to try transcribing an interview on to paper, please contact the editor or Heather.

The Society now has copies of the following Wadhurst censuses on CD: 1841, 1851, 1861, 1891 and 1901. They may be borrowed from the editor for Task Group research—format is either Access database, Excel spreadsheet or Acrobat pdf.

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 the answers to earlier problems.

Information Wanted

None for this issue

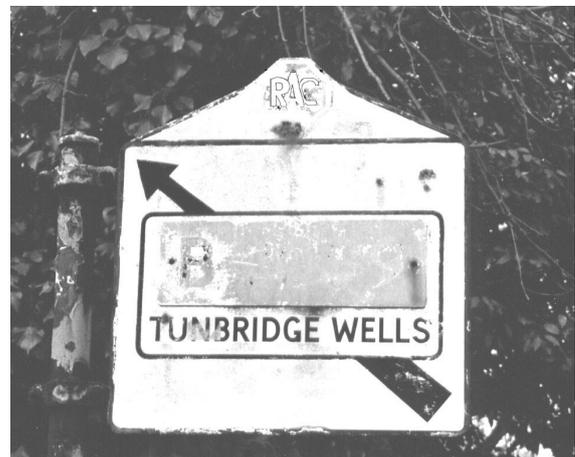
Information Received

Mr H C Bassett, now living in New Romney, has written:

"Born and bred in Faircrouch Road, Wadhurst, the grandson / son of once well known Bassetts—steeplejacks and church spire shinglers—Charles and son Thomas, who had their business there. James—an older brother of Charles—had the wheelwright / coach builder / blacksmith business in Durgates"

He has researched his branch of the Bassett family tree and is happy to share his knowledge—contact via the editor.

Andrew Belsey, from Cardiff, was driving through Wadhurst in the Spring and took this photo:



Erected by the R.A.C. in the days when there was a real possibility that motorists might think the main road went up the north side of St James's Square and placed outside Uplands, the sign has been 'vandalised' by the highway authority with the addition of the B 2099 and has now fallen into disrepair. Andrew feels that the History Society should launch a project to restore the sign—what do members think?

Another extract from Peter Brandon's book *'The Kent & Sussex Weald'* p158:

"The same havoc [*excessive tree felling*] was wrought on the commons of Wadhurst, where ironworks were particularly numerous. One incident is well documented. Alexander Collins was reported to have felled most of the oaks on Coursley [*sic*] Common, Wadhurst in 1548. Crossley defends this action on the grounds an experienced ironmaster, such as Collins, would have re-established the wood as coppice; but tree regeneration would have been greatly hampered, if not completely foiled, by the exercise of common rights."

Now the only common land in Wadhurst parish is the green in Woods Green, registered as CL28 under the Commons Registration (East Sussex) Act 1994, passed by Parliament to allow for the reconstitution of the Commons Registers, which were destroyed by fire in Lewes in 1993.

Visit the Society's website—www.wadhurst.info/whs for updates and reports on what has been achieved by Task Groups before the next Newsletter.