

The Life of William Pilbeam  
&  
The Escape from Ticehurst House

At the January meeting Malcolm Pilbeam gave us a very interesting talk about his grandfather William Pilbeam. Born in 1873 into a modest family living in Burwash, he was to become involved with one of the world's richest families.

Before this he had an adventurous career in the army. He enlisted in the Rifle Brigade in 1888 and was posted to India and Hong Kong.

In 1896 he returned to civilian life and obtained a post at a mental institute in Westcliffe.

In 1899 as a reservist he was recalled to serve during the Boer War. He took part in the relief of Lady Smith. His army career was ended by an accident with a jammed cartridge which resulted in the loss of his left eye and in 1901 he returned home, where he was awarded the Queen's South African Medal.

He was employed at Ticehurst House and became attendant to Prince Ahmed Seif-ed- Din. This was an event that was to transform his life.

The Prince was at Ticehurst House following the attempted murder of his brother-in-law Prince Fuad, future king of Egypt, in Cairo. He had been transferred to Ticehurst House by the British Authority in Egypt, having been declared insane. During the next 24 years William became the Prince's trusted attendant.

In 1901 William married Bessie Pearson and she bore him five children. Now this is where things get really exciting.

The Prince's mother Princess Nougan never accepted that her son was insane and employed the best lawyers to obtain his release. In August 1925 the sudden disappearance of the Prince was reported in national newspapers.

The Prince had driven to Hastings with William and another attendant, Hyland. While Hyland was diverted by being sent to buy a newspaper, they bought tickets to Boulogne on PS Devonian. On board they were joined by an attendant from Westcliffe called Bastone.

They were met in Boulogne by the Prince's mother and step father and took a plane to Paris. Meanwhile fifteen detectives had been sent from England to track them down.

After many changes of location they ended up in Constantinople. William and Bastone did not find life here easy as the Prince, relishing his new found freedom, was not an easy master. Bastone decided to return to England in 1928 and on his arrival was arrested charged with aiding and abetting the escape and fined £20.

In 1930 William became ill and expressed the wish to return to England. The Prince begged him to stay and William agreed on condition Bessie could join

him in Constantinople. In spite of being attended by the best doctors it became clear that William was dying and in December he said farewell to the Prince and returned to England in 1932.

As he was a wanted man he was arrested at Dover and like Bastone was fined £20 for aiding and abetting the escape.

William lived long enough to learn that the Prince had married Princess Ulviya, daughter of the then governor of Constantinople.

William died in June 1933 after a relatively short life but one filled with many adventures.

His wife Bessie seems to have been well provided for and lived in Ticehurst until her death in 1954.