This photograph of the Interior of the Parish Church was sent as a postcard in 1921 and shows clearly how it looked prior to its major re-organisation in 1932.

Much is, of course, instantly recognisable today but note the position of the organ pipes on either side of the chancel. They had been installed there in the 19th century: “a position that had for a long time been considered unsatisfactory from both an acoustic and aesthetic point of view” as Arthur Dewar explained in chapter 12 of the WHS publication, *Wadhurst Back in Time*. Sir Walter Parratt, the foremost organist of the early 20th century had advocated its reconstruction in 1901 but it took a good deal of time to answer his plea.

The 1932 Patronal Festival coincided with the dedication of the installation of the new organ console on the north side of the chancel and the new repositioning of the organ pipes at the west end of the church. There they remain to this day.

The lectern is now placed in front of the south side of the chancel arch and the lighting has been brought up to date. We do not now have carpeting up the centre chancel aisle, however.
Meetings to come:

Your new Membership cards give you the full list of 2019 talks and speakers.

Talks begin at 8 pm and take place in the Commemoration Hall.

Bar opens at 7.30.

Wed. 10th April
“A Journey along the South Coast” by Peter Gillies, with Victorian lantern slides.

Thurs. 9th May:
“The Thames Discovery Programme” by Nathalie Cohen.

Thurs 13th June:
“The British Navy 1793 – 1815” by Alaria Bond

Thurs 11th July:

SUMMER BREAK

Thurs 19th September:
“Prisoners of War at Sissinghurst Castle” by Peter Mellor.

Thurs 10th October:
“Manipulating Monarchs” by Julia Cruse, postponed from last year.

Thurs 7th November:
“Sussex Gravestones and Graves” by Kevin Gordon

Thurs 12th December:
AGM with Kathleen Collett entertaining us afterwards.

-O-O-O-O- 

OUR MAJOR EXHIBITION

The 1st World War and its Uneasy Peace” – our major centenary exhibition to mark the actual end of the war on 28th June 1919. Our exhibition will be mounted in the Commemoration Hall from Friday 28th June until Sunday 30th June. There will be an Officers’ Mess for snacks and refreshments. Fuller specific details in due course. Meanwhile, please will you:

• Tell your friends about it and bring them along
• Offer to help as a steward, welcomer etc
• Bake some goodies for the Officers’ Mess
• Offer to help at the Mess
• Help with setting up and taking down again.
• Provide raffle prizes.

ETC!

This has to be a real generator of funds for the Society because, as you know, the rent of the Centre has gone up greatly and will do so annually from now on.

It’s up to us all.

-O-O-O-O-
MONTHLY TALKS:

November 2018: In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poppy by Heather Woodward

Fittingly, at Remembrance tide, Heather spoke of the poppy as a symbol of conflict, loss, and remembrance, the common (or corn or field) poppy and opium poppy referred to here being just two of some 250 varieties of the flower.

Poppies enjoy a short life, reflecting that of the lives lost in battle, and it was observed, after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, that the ground was red with poppies, suggestive of the blood spilt on that battlefield. Indeed, poppies do flourish where there is both sunshine and disturbed soil, clearly accounting for their proliferation in the fields of northern France and Flanders.

Ironically, the opium poppy has been used by the military as an opiate in healing the traumas of war (laudanum has been employed by the Royal Navy for a long time); yet those men once healed are then returned to the fight, where they are again subject to wounding, maiming, and death. Similarly, profits from the poppy trade have been utilised for the acquisition of weapons at the same time as the opiate seeks to alleviate the suffering caused by those weapons.

Being simple to draw and paint, poppies have been prominent in art and architecture, while Keats noted “sound asleep, drows’d with the fume of poppies”, Burns observed that “poppies are like pleasures spread: “you seize the flower, its bloom is shed”, and Francis Thompson reflected that “summer set lip to earth’s bosom here, and left the flushed print in a poppy there”. Modern writer, Dr Nicholas Saunders, speaks of endless columns replenished, cut down, replaced, and flowering again.

Despite the desecration on a colossal scale at the Somme, poppies were in profusion, basking in the sun: Fred Hodges (1899-2002), a soldier of the Great War, picked a bunch of poppies, which he placed in a metal cup attached to his rifle (used for the firing of a grenade), acutely conscious of their growing amidst all the manmade destruction; nature just getting on with life with her bank of deep red poppies. [Sensibly, Hodges removed his poppies from the cup before his sergeant saw them].

At Essex Farm on 2nd May 1915, military doctor, Lt. Col. John McCrae (1872-1918) recited the Order of Burial of the Dead in complete darkness, at a fellow officer’s funeral, then wrote the poem “In Flanders Fields” the next day. The vast majority of deaths in the Great War were not of experienced soldiers, but youths and young men. McCrae himself, however, died of influenza at the age of 47, and was buried at Wimereux on the French coast, escorted by his horse, Bonfire.

In 1919, the American professor, Moina Michael, sold real poppies and wrote a poem in response to McCrae’s poem including the words “and now the torch and poppy red, ‘Wear in honour of our dead”, and Mme Anne Guérin (The Poppy Lady of France), actually a Belgian, did likewise to help support needy veteran soldiers and their families.

The pre-war soil in Belgium had not been particularly fertile, but the blood, bones, and lime and calcium (from the shells) caused poppies to flourish in Flanders fields, thus providing us with the perfect flower to symbolise remembrance.

Eye-catching and effective, the poppy quickly became synonymous with remembrance, although the French decided upon the cornflower (le bleuet), based on the colour of the uniforms worn by the ‘poilus’, the ordinary French soldiers at the beginning of the war. Curiously, poppies were initially sold [nowadays, they are offered in return for a donation], the material being cloth or silk. Prices varied from 1d to a half-crown, dependent upon one’s social status (e.g., a child, working-class person, member of the gentry.)

In Britain, the first National Day of Remembrance was held on 11th November 1921, at a cenotaph constructed of cardboard, prior to the erection of the permanent Cenotaph in Whitehall. Remembrance was, and is, seen as an act of solidarity, not an option, rather a moral duty, Remembrance Sunday now being the nearest Sunday to Armistice Day (11th November = the date in 1918 when the guns fell silent and the fighting ceased).

On 30th May 1927, the American flyer, Charles Lindbergh, flew over a US cemetery, dropping poppies. Since that time, the last Monday in May is observed, in the USA, as Memorial Day, whereas 11 November is known there as Veterans’ Day. In Belgium, the Last Post has been played at the Menin Gate in Ypres, at 8 o’clock each evening for 90 years, solemnly and reflectively, recalling the cost of the freedoms which we have enjoyed as a result of the sacrifice made on those French and Belgian fields between 1914 and 1918. The only gap was during the years of the 2nd World War. The Royal British Legion,
the de facto custodian of remembrance, arranges the annual Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, where, at the end of the event, a million poppies float down from the ceiling, representing the number of British and Empire war dead of the Great War.

Heather demonstrated, eloquently, that in November 2018, certainly, there is much recognition, in the public conscience, of the sacrifice made during more than four terrible years of war on an industrial scale, by our forebears one hundred years ago. We therefore wear the poppy with pride, reverence, and solemnity - Lest We Forget.

Stefan Gatward

January 2019: The Romans in Sussex
by Brian Braby

In January 2019 we had a very lively and entertaining talk from Brian Braby a teacher historian and geologist. The change in venue to the Uplands Sixth Form Centre meant that we had a somewhat smaller audience than usual which was disappointing for those of our members who missed this very good talk.

The Roman Emperor Claudius is thought to have landed his army at Richborough in Kent in AD 43, close to the Isle of Thanet. Richborough was once an important natural harbour. The main reason the Romans came into Sussex, in AD 43, was to obtain the iron which had been exported by the Celts to Europe until the Roman invasion. Two dozen pre-Roman Iron Working sites have been found, mostly in East Sussex including one at Bardown just north of Stonegate. The largest Roman Settlement discovered is at Fishbourne close to Chichester and neighbouring Chichester Harbour. We were shown some excellent drawings not only of the present museum but also of the probable original palace bath house and surrounding gardens which would have had a footprint larger than Buckingham Palace.

Although local people had known of the existence of Roman remains in the area, it was not until 1960 that the archaeologist Barry Cunliffe first systematically excavated the Fishbourne site, which had been accidentally uncovered by Aubrey Barrett, an engineer working for Portsmouth Water Company who was laying a new water main across a field. Fishbourne is by far the largest Roman residence known north of the Alps. A museum has been built by the Sussex Archaeological Society, incorporating most of the visible remains including one wing of the palace. The first buildings at Fishbourne appear to have been a supply base for the Roman army, constructed in the early part of the 43 AD conquest.

The location of Fishbourne in proximity to Chichester (Noviomagus Reginorum) is often considered when discussing the opulent wealth represented at Fishbourne. The city of Chichester was in the heart of the dominant Atrebates tribe, but their early introduction to Roman imperialism created a pseudo-friendly relationship between the Romans and the Atrebates; the tribal people in this area were later called the Regnii as they had been ruled by Roman client kings for so long.

Fishbourne Roman Villa.

We were told about a further discovery: the Roman villa dating from c.200 AD north east of Chichester at Bignor where the discovered mosaics are said to be as good as any in Europe - the portrayed features in the mosaics being particularly remarkable. Bignor is close to Stane Street, the amazingly straight Roman road built from Chichester to London, negotiating a route through the South Downs and other hazards with a series of “elbows”.

Two Roman mansions, around the sites of today’s service stations, have been discovered on Stane Street about 12 miles apart; they were built for rest and refreshment for travellers on Stane Street.

The Romans left Sussex in c. 410 AD. Research work continues to uncover evidence of the Roman occupation of the County.

Martin Turner

Supplementary note: Julius Caesar invaded Britain in 55 and 54 BC but never came to Sussex.

February 2019
A Schoolgirl’s War
by Mary Smith

This talk became possible, following the discovery of a cardboard box containing a wartime diary, 1939/1946, illustrated with sketches in vibrant colour, fine detail, and a sense of movement, produced by Helen Keen, art mistress at Maidstone Girls’ Grammar School [MGGS]. This visual record was enhanced by the oral testimony of 53 MGGS Old Girls located and interviewed several decades afterwards.

In September 1938, the school, by then 50 years old, moved into its brand-new building, having just left cramped Victorian premises in Maidstone town centre. The new school was a thing of beauty, built for “peace, happiness, and sunshine”, yet, twelve months later,
war was to come, and its older girls would be assisting
with the subdued, frightened evacuees arriving from
London, whilst those who were Girl Guides helped
mothers arriving with babies. One sad aspect of
the ‘selection process’ of the evacuees was that those left
unbilleted at the end were placed in children’s homes.

King’s Warren School, from Plumstead, was evacuated
to Maidstone, its 240 girls augmenting the total roll to
740 girls, but everyone was ordered to stay away from
school until the air raid shelters were ready. Postcards
were issued, notifying girls of a rolling programme
of morning and afternoon lesson ‘shifts’, with home
working also required; the shelters reached completion
in February 1940, at which time full-time schooling
could recommence.

An intact underground air raid shelter was discovered
at the school in 2013: during the war, lessons were
held in its tunnels once the air raid siren was heard.
Girls formed up silently, entering to take their places
on benches in the shelter, where lessons continued and
lunch could be served. Every girl had to carry her
respirator [gas mask] at all times, subject to a 1d. fine
for non-compliance! Sticky netting was applied to the
school windows as a precaution against blast damage,
while trenches dug in the open were configured in a
zigzag format, since blast travels in a straight line.
Electricity was installed in the shelters eighteen
months into the war, four lanterns to each tunnel having
previously provided the light.

Teachers had to bellow, rather than speak normally, this
resulting in every class hearing every other class, which,
combined with the noise of bombing and anti-aircraft
guns above, must have been a considerable trial. In the
absence of a blackboard, teachers wrote in chalk on the
wooden walls. The tunnels were so narrow that not
every girl was visible to her teacher; so that a teacher
could move through the class, the command “legs
left!” was given. With all legs carefully facing in the
same direction, a veritable path appeared in the centre.

The first two winters of the war were very cold, so
girls were required to wear boots, hats, overcoats, and
scarves at all times in the uncomfortable, cold, wet, and
cramped environment of these tunnels constituting their
classrooms. Maidstone was hardly a safe place to be,
and one hobby of the girls was to go shrapnel hunting,
collecting the hot, jagged pieces of metal which had
fallen from the skies. It was grimly thought by some
girls that taking up the opportunity to learn German
might prove handy if Britain were defeated.

At that time, it was the law that female teachers should
be unmarried, so it is remarkable that women, some
young, others middle-aged, had such dedication both
to their career and their girls in a way which may not
be understood today. Given that there was a war being
waged, it is not an exaggeration to say that there was
something heroic about these ladies. One of the teachers
was a ‘Mrs’, she having had the misfortune to lose her
husband earlier in the war. In 1941, the London County
Council [LCC] came to re-evacuate the Plumstead
contingent to Bedford.

In November 1941, no manpower existed for supplying
school milk in the ½ pint bottles, so it fell to the
teachers to measure out milk, which was also available
in powder form. Girls and teachers engaged in knitting,
sewing, gardening, tending allotments; during evenings
and weekends, some took on fire-watching duties. By
June 1944, the V1 [doodlebug] was bringing terror
to southern England, so teachers with free teaching
periods were called upon to undertake doodlebug-
watch and ring a warning bell as necessary.

During the early May days of 1945, VE Day falling
on 8th, girls and teachers happily pulled off the sticky
netting from the windows, and, in later months, with
their fathers’ help (and possibly that of prisoners of
war), broke down the baffle walls; the trenches were
demolished in 1948.

Some 50 years after this time of discomfort and
uncertainty, several MGGS Old Girls returned to the
school for a tea party (many meeting former class
mates for the first time in all those years) to share, once
again, that air raid shelter experience. Those Old Girls
now living in the USA and Australia were not present,
although their important oral testimony lives on.

Mary Smith was the headmistress of Maidstone Girls’
Grammar School in recent times, and has produced a
book entitled “A Schoolgirl’s War”, the subject of this
talk, combining Helen Keen’s artwork with the 53 Old
Girls’ oral testimony, supported by research through
the archives of the Kent Messenger; and historical
records of both the local library and the Imperial War
Museum. Sadly, Helen Keen (1912-2005) died
before she could give her oral contribution, so her art
work has to speak for her, and it speaks most eloquently
of those years when MGGS carried on in the county
town of Kent, so close to continental Europe and on
the very flight path of the bombers bringing destruction
and misery to our land.

An interesting footnote here is that Miss R. Bartels,
headmistress from 1930 to 1951 (by all accounts a tartar
reputedly alien to the giving of praise), regularly drove
into ravaged parts of Maidstone, in order to ascertain
whether any girl had lost home or family, and so avoid
her enduring sudden unimaginable trauma on returning
home. Such compassion and humanity speaks volumes
for the school, its headmistress, and the unmarried
women who continued offering a grammar school
education to their girls during the Second World War.

Stefan Gutward
March 2019: The Race to the South Pole by Michael Smith

Even in the 16th century, it was speculated that an unknown southern continent existed, known, in Latin, as Terra Australis Incognita; the ancient Greeks had also reasoned that, since there was evidence of land in the Northern Hemisphere beneath the Great Bear, it must be counterbalanced by territory at the opposite end.

There was scant interest during the 18th and 19th centuries. Captain Cook had attempted a first-ever crossing of the Antarctic Circle, but, having reached 60 miles from a foggy coast, declared that it was “not worth having, if there”. Similarly, a Northumbrian ship rounded Cape Horn in 1819, drove south in bad winds, and ran among uncharted islands. Reporting the experience to the Royal Navy in Chile, the ship’s master found the RN uninterested. Later that year, the same ship reached land, unfurled a flag, and went again to the RN. The RN contacted one Edward Bransfield, who travelled south 2000 miles to reach the islands. In January 1820, Bransfield came upon the Antarctic Peninsula, mapped it, charted it, but received little in the way of interest. His records became lost, as did those of an Estonian Russian, von Bellingshausen, who thought he had sighted land.

It is worth noting that Bransfield, born in Cork, had been press-ganged, in 1803, as an 18-year-old, served during the Napoleonic wars, became a ship’s master, entered the Merchant Navy, and disappeared from view, eventually living, and dying, in Brighton. Reports suggest that the Republic of Ireland will raise a monument to him in 2020.

During the 1830s, Sir James Clark Ross and Francis Crozier went to the Antarctic, spending four years there, on the greatest maritime expedition of the 19th century. They found volcanoes which they named Erebus and Terror, after their ships, which, at one point, became entwined in the darkness, separated, and passed through an incredibly narrow gap in the icebergs. On returning to Britain in 1843, they found that no-one really cared, and so it was for most of the remainder of Queen Victoria’s reign.

The mid-1890s saw an intention to look anew at the Antarctic. Carsten Borchgrevink, a Norwegian, persuaded Sir George Newnes to grant him funds for a first overwintering on land in 1898. It is dark for four months in winter, the sun never rising, yet Borchgrevink penetrated 100 miles into the interior.

In 1901, Robert Falcon Scott took Discovery on an expedition, the first concerted attempt at exploring the interior. Although the coast was relatively warm, temperatures fell to 40° Celsius/Fahrenheit in the interior. Scott, Shackleton, and Wilson found themselves suffering the early stages of scurvy, and made it back with difficulty.

The anti-English Scot, William Spears Bruce, a supreme Antarctic scientist, established the first scientific weather station in Antarctica; Jean-Baptiste Charcot, an intelligent French adventurer, took pictures of Loubet Sound and the Palmer Archipelago.

Shackleton, in 1907, made the best attempt to that date, reaching within 67 miles of the Pole. He took four ponies, rather than dogs, but three died and one fell into a crevice, together with all the equipment. Shackleton discovered the route of the Beardmore Glacier, 125 miles long, running into a plateau two miles high. He had food for 91 days, most insufficient, but, by rationing supplies, eked out the period to 122 days. Although his body temperature fell below the standard 98.4°F, he had the judgement to turn back, telling his wife that she might prefer “a live donkey to a dead lion”.

This gave Scott the spur to go again. Although Shackleton was always keen to help the scientists, Scott was a difficult character, single-mindedly purposing to reach the Pole. At the same time, Roald Amundsen, a Norwegian, who had desired, since his youngest days, to be a tough, driven explorer, wanted, in 1910, the North Pole to be his focus. Amundsen borrowed Fram, a ship specially designed by Fridtjof Nansen to ‘ride’ the ice, seized his moment, and set off from Oslo on 6th June 1910, but sailed due south, and, on reaching Madeira, explained to his men his true purpose. He had with him a champion skier, men who had trained dogs, a handyman, and one of Nansen’s men. He journeyed 14000 miles from Madeira in one go, trying to overtake Scott.

The ship used by Amundsen – ‘FRAM’

Scott, at Melbourne, received a telegram from Amundsen, stating “proceeding South”. A little concerned that Scott had the use of three ‘tractors’
Amundsen was not to know that those vehicles were unreliable. When Scott, Oates, Bowers, Wilson, and Evans got underway, the final push of the Race to the South Pole had really begun.

Amundsen took 48 dogs, and sent his champion skier forward, in order to give the dogs a focus. He set out two weeks before Scott, who followed Shackleton’s route. Inspired, or foolhardy, Amundsen chose to build his hut on a floating piece of ice, ‘welded’ to the island beneath (a fact unknown for the next 30 years), and laid several tons of food in dépôts, which he numbered with flags, lest they be missed. Scott also laid dépôts, marked by black flags on mounds of snow.

Scott’s progress was 3 or perhaps 10 miles a day without rest days, whereas Amundsen built in rest days, and averaged 15 to 20 miles a day, reaching the Pole on 14 December 1911, remaining there for three days. Scott arrived one month later, to find a letter from Amundsen, addressed to the King of Norway, which Scott was to carry back for him.

Amundsen had left for Hobart, Tasmania, arriving on 7th March 1912, unaware, at that stage, whether Scott had reached the Pole. In fact, Scott and his colleagues were now in a bad way, suffering from starvation and frostbite; Scott penned his last diary entry on 29th March 1912. Scott, Bowers, and Wilson died at about that time, and were later buried out in Antarctica.

Thus ended the Race to the South Pole, at a time of appalling weather conditions. On their return, the heroic Amundsen and his colleagues weighed themselves, finding that they had put on weight, realising that all their careful planning, including their Eskimo-style clothing had been eminently suitable for the Antarctic. Amundsen asked his Norwegian cook “any chance of a cup of coffee?”

**Stefan Gatward**

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**News from the Centre – Spring 2019**

The Centre continues to be a busy and lively space with a diversity of enquiries and plenty of research being dealt with on a weekly basis. Archiving is soldiering on and filing is filling the drawers. The work on the Smugglers of Hawkhurst is nearing completion, thanks to the stalwart efforts of Serena and Roberta. We are also now beginning to work out the logistics for the organisation of the June Exhibition: The 1st World War and its Uneasy Peace. See the next section of this Newsletter so that you can familiarise yourself with the details and decide how you could offer to help in some way during the three days.

We are a very small committee and do need your support! We are delighted that the Wadhurst Twinning Association will also be helping us.

The final editing and correcting of the next WHS publication is well underway and, once all the creases have been ironed out, the manuscript will go to the printers. We are also planning our calendar for the Christmas rush - probably something a bit different yet again.

We don’t rest on our laurels, as you can see!

**The 1st World War and Its Uneasy Peace**

**CENTENARY OF THE PEACE RATIFICATION EXHIBITION,**

**28th – 30th June 2019**

**Commemoration Hall, Wadhurst**

Although the Armistice of November 1918 ended the fighting, it needed to be prolonged three times until the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919 took effect on 10 January 1920.

The community here in Wadhurst marked the centenary of the end of the war on 11th November 2018, and so, anticipating that probability, over a year ago, we deliberately booked dates for our Exhibition that were relevant and would not clash with whatever was being planned. The exhibition will therefore be from **Friday 28th till Sunday 30th June 2019** in the Commemoration Hall – 10 am to 6 pm on the Friday and Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm on the Sunday. We shall again be serving light refreshments but fuller details in due course. Offers of help would be gratefully received. The Exhibition will commemorate the immensely significant ratification of the 1st World War peace treaty in Versailles. We will try to show why the war happened, what happened during it and the consequences of it.

None of us can remember the 1st World War, of course, but many will have heard stories and yarns from their family and friends about what grandparents, great-uncles and others did and saw and where they were etc. The custom of the day was not to talk at home about what really happened but eventually snippets were revealed and stories (often the funny ones) were told.

We would very much like to hear any such stories which you have heard from your family or friends. Please can you trawl through your memories of conversations overheard etc and see what reminiscences you can tell us about. We can give you special sheets to record these, as we did for the commemoration for the Queen’s coronation by ringing me on 783212 and you can always leave a message on my ansaphone. They can then be used in the exhibition and thus provide fascinating personal insights into what went on.

We are already receiving enthusiastic support from some Wadhurst History Society members who are clearly very much enjoying their research and planning their display material. We are hoping that still
others would like to contribute some research to this exhibition. If there is anyone else out there [YOU?] who would like to research and prepare a small display of interest, please do pop in one Tuesday morning, find out more and see which aspects still need covering.

It really is a fascinating experience working on a small segment and discovering as much as possible about it. The list of topics which you might like to consider covering is at every meeting so please will you take time to peruse and then offer! Please talk to either Heather Woodward (783212) about which aspect might interest you or go into the Wadhurst History Centre on a Tuesday morning where you can select from the list of as-yet unallotted topics.

PLEASE WILL YOU PUT THE DATES IN YOUR DIARIES (they are already on the WHS Calendars) .AND THINK OF ANY PHOTOGRAPHS/ MEMORABILIA YOU COULD POSSIBLY LEND US.

Now back to more items for this 42nd Newsletter:-

In the last Newsletter, we read the first part of Janet Carmichael (née Meadmore)’s memoir of life at Hill House in the early years of the 2nd World War. We continue it as promised with a lot more about Mer (Auntie Nan):

Hill House Memories – Part Two

Hill House ran parallel to the main road, behind a high wall which went down the hill to the village and was set back only about thirty feet. The entrance to the front porch was through a gate set in the wall and pedestrian path. The wide, main entrance was at the other end of the frontage and went past the horse-pond and the stables, glasshouses, kitchen garden through to the yard fronting on to the kitchen. Beyond the yard were more outhouses, a large barn, the shrubbery lining a grass walk and the hospital garden through to the yard fronting on to the kitchen. Beyond this room was a passage to more connecting bedrooms and, at the end the only bathroom, large with an enormous bath, the door to the nursery wing where Rachel and Robert had rooms and the back stairs up to the attics and down to the only other lavatory. In this downstairs passage were three or four small rooms including a pantry, a china room, a room for silverware, a linen room and a small sitting room. In my time, Robin had taken over the room next to the lavatory (which which was known as the Micky because of its Micky Mouse wallpaper) as his office so, for us, needing to go to the micky was a trauma.

At the end of this passage was a door, actually covered in old green baize, to the kitchen wing and, opposite a door leading to Nan’s retreat, the library, not very large, not with many books, but cosy, with an armchair where she would sit to knit, a large desk covered with papers, and, presumably, the house telephone. The other door from the library led back to the entrance hall. Opposite, was the drawing room, large, with a window to the front and then, round to the side of the house french doors leading on to the rockery garden which Nan looked after. Another door led into the conservatory with its big iron pipes for heating, and benches full of cinerarias. We used the drawing room on Sundays and holidays. We would watch the small television or listen to light music on the radio and, if the national anthem was played, we all, prompted by Mer, stood to attention.

From the conservatory was a door into the studio, a very large room which was the centre of activities during the week. Mer spent a lot of time with us children here. We would paint and draw but never emulated the charming watercolour paintings of flowers that Mer produced. Chiefly, I remember her teaching us to make things. We learnt to make padded boxes - the base was squares of cardboard which were padded and covered with fabric from a large drawerful of remnants and then assembled into a box and decorated with lace. Later Mer would ask large groups of soldiers to tea which would be in this room and we would wait on them. Once one kissed us and Inge and I were in agonies believing ourselves not only to be pregnant but that a baby would be born any day.

Beyond the studio was the dining room, rather small but with an enormous mahogany table and a lot of carved chairs, which connected back to the passage with the baize door.

I don’t know where Robin went to school (later he was sent to Gordonstoun) but Rachel, Inge and I went to Wadhurst College. Everyday Mr. Barrow would bring the trap to the yard door and drive us to the school which was about two miles away. Then he would pick us up in the afternoon for the homeward journey. I have no memories of academic lessons at school but do remember endless exercising in the
gym, deportment lessons, being exhorted to “cradle the ball” in lacrosse, handiwork in the studio and protracted and formal lunch times. The table would be laid with white starched cloths with full cutlery and sitting up straight was paramount. Looking back, I see it more as a finishing school than a place of education and my mother was, early on, concerned about the lack of academic work. For a while I had lessons with Mrs. Noyce, a private teacher who was trying to establish a small school locally. Inge and I saw her as rather a romantic figure as she had eloped from her home when very young with the family chauffeur. She had a daughter called Penny.

Mer would also go on long outings with us to the surrounding countryside. We went blackberrying and she taught us to recognise wild flowers and I remember spending more time with her than I did with my mother who was, presumably, busy with the evacuees. After the last maids left, the house continued to function but I have no idea who did the cooking, organised the laundry or generally ran the house. Mer couldn’t have had much time left after spending it with us and with her involvement with the church, the war effort, keeping in touch with the Red Cross and being very much at the hub of local life. I’m not sure how close anyone came to intimacy with her and see her very much as a loner. She spent a lot of time and effort with us children but I don’t remember her as fun or got as close to her as I did, for instance, to Lynnie and I think Inge felt the same. Possibly our view was coloured by the fact that we perceived Rachel and Robin as getting the lion’s share of any treats, like the chocolate buns which Mer would have made with some precious bit of leeway from the rations and the fact that she was unable to protect us from Robin. Now, I see her as a truly good and conscientious person, a touch rigid and with very little sense of humour. She was practical and, maybe, not very imaginative, as when she knitted an enormous pair of seaman’s stockings and put them in the collection plate at church on Seamen’s Sunday.

I am not sure how long I was at Hill House for; perhaps only about a year. My father had stayed in London in our house on the edge of Hampstead Heath, where there were gun emplacements. It was bombed but he escaped and had moved to Chelsea and I think my mother decided she would rather be with him in London than stay on at Hill House. Room was found for me with my Sevenoaks aunt, a repressive Christian Scientist, and now, it was my turn to go into exile. But I did not sever my ties to Hill House or to Inge and managed to visit quite often.

One of my last memories of Mer was on V.E day. Everyone was celebrating and she decided to take us to London to join in. Mr. Greig of the village taxi service providing the transport. Rachel, Inge, Margit and I (I don’t remember Robin being at home) dressed for the occasion by riffling through the old prewar dresses in the wardrobe room. I can only imagine what we looked like; perhaps, that is why when we trailed up to the grand entrance of the Dorchester Hotel we were turned away. Undaunted, Mer took us all to Lyons Corner House in the Strand.

I barely went back after Inge left Hill House. At one point we shared a room together on the top floor of the Chelsea house where our boyfriends, both called Don, used to stay. Inge married quite soon and, of course, I went back to Hill House for the wedding which Mer organised. I remember going to Rachel’s 21st birthday but that was probably the last time I was there. But Inge and I have been best friends ever since.

Janet Carmichael

More About Hill House

In 1894, Mrs Rhys Davids (née Caroline Foley, daughter of the Revd John Foley, the vicar) who had lived at Hill House gave a lecture in Wadhurst School entitled The Story of Wadhurst. On page 117, she tells that the then Bishop Ryle, Dean of Westminster, described Hill House:
I was only nine years old when I went to the little school and I spent 2½ years there. There were only nine or ten boys, and we were treated by Mr and Mrs Wace as if we were members of a large family. We were taught to ride on a pony, and some of us were promoted to ride on the grey mare, while Mr Wace himself rode on a big brown horse.

[Mrs Rhys Davids commented at this point that “it is pleasant to find a learned Dean commending first, as often now, the athletic side of a school!”]

The Dean continued: Our lessons were done on what would now be regarded as very old-fashioned lines. We learned the elements of Greek and Latin and were well-coached in Arithmetic, Algebra and Euclid; and we did a small modicum of Ancient History. We never did examination papers, and such extraneous things as map drawing, essay writing, English Literature or French were never thought of. Mr Wace was an old Evangelist. His influence was good - our Sundays were happy days. Our lessons were done on the railway line in March 2019, it is interesting to realise that nothing is new - as illustrated by extracts from an article written by Frank Sellens, the erstwhile Courier historian, describing a similar incident on the railway line in March 2019. It is interesting to realise that nothing is new - as illustrated by extracts from an article written by Frank Sellens, the erstwhile Courier historian, describing a similar incident on the railway line in March 2019.

Rumours began to circulate when the 5.05 pm express from Hastings was more than an hour late on the evening of Monday January 6, 1930. The train had been trapped in a landslide near Wadhurst. Its coaches had been overwhelmed by a pile of earth and stones. A Pullman car had been badly damaged. Passengers had been plunged into darkness. And so the story went on.

Fortunately as the Kent and Sussex Courier soon discovered “these reports were greatly exaggerated”.

The 5.05 was approaching the south end of Wadhurst tunnel, travelling at a medium speed on an adverse gradient, when the driver saw that the track ahead was obstructed by a pile of earth and bushes. He braked and was bringing the train to a standstill when there was another – and bigger – landslide. A large quantity of earth and stones piled up against the rear coaches of the train, alarming the passengers, although there was no panic. Among them were actors and actresses who were due to appear in London that same night.

When the passengers had been transferred to the front portion of the rain, the 5.05 resumed its journey and an hour and forty minutes later arrived in Tunbridge Wells.

Meanwhile, breakdown gangs had hurried to the scene. Working all night by the light of flares, they cleared the line to enable the 6.48 up train from Hastings to run through unhindered next morning.

An area of 70ft long and 90ft high subsided on to the tracks and the soil had to be carried away for some distance. Heavy rain during the previous week was believed to have been the cause of the landslide, coupled with the vibration of the passing trains.

Twenty-one years earlier, in November 1909, there was an incident between Stonegate – then known as Ticehurst Road – and Wadhurst in very similar circumstances. On a Sunday evening, workmen were engaged in clearing “an insignificant subsidence”. A few minutes after a train had passed, about 50 yards of the muddy bank gave way and “many tons of earth fell into an adjacent field”. Once again, prompt action averted a disaster: “Word was at once passed up and down the line and all traffic was suspended.”

And some other random discoveries

Baptist Chapels In Wadhurst

In troublous times, Wadhurst afforded considerable tolerance to Baptists, who appreciated it and came hither in large numbers. Why do we not clearly see but we take it that the presence in the neighbourhood of two distinguished tolerant Protestant families (Roberts of Slassenbury and Courthope of Whiligh) made much of the tolerance. Both families expressed great sympathy with liberty of conscience.

In 2011, the National Trust began an appeal to save Castle Drogo in Drewsteignton, Devon from disastrous decay. This was of particular interest to us, because the owner of the property had previously been the much respected land-owner at Wadhurst Hall - Julius Drewe. Extracts from an article in The Independent, of October 2011 explain the situation and background:-

Drogo, Britains Yougest Castle, Faces A Battle For Survival

Julius Drewe was just 33 when he decided to cash in and spend the rest of his life playing the country squire. The year was 1889 and Drewe’s astonishing success from relatively humble origins marked him as Ticehurst Road – and Wadhurst in very similar circumstances. On a Sunday evening, workmen were engaged in clearing “an insignificant subsidence”. A few minutes after a train had passed, about 50 yards of the muddy bank gave way and “many tons of earth fell into an adjacent field”. Once again, prompt action averted a disaster: “Word was at once passed up and down the line and all traffic was suspended.”

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Julius Drewe was just 33 when he decided to cash in and spend the rest of his life playing the country squire. The year was 1889 and Drewe’s astonishing success from relatively humble origins marked him
out as the prototype for generations of self-made retail tycoons.

But the young magnate’s legacy was not to be the chain of Home and Colonial Stores which he had launched. Instead it was the granite fortress completed 40 years later which he built for himself and his family from the vast wealth accrued servicing Britain’s love affair with the cup of tea.

Castle Drogo, the last castle to be built in Britain and an epic fantasy blending Norman and Tudor styles, was conceived and executed on the edge of Dartmoor near Exeter by the most celebrated architect of the age, Sir Edwin Lutyens. But today, (in 2011) the future of what is considered one of the most important and grandest private dwellings of the 20th century is under threat. Water has penetrated the exterior fabric of the building and deep into its 12-ft thick walls and the leaks have wrought havoc to parts of the interior. They need to replace Lutyens’ huge flat-roof structure with new materials to make it permanently watertight.

Building had begun in 1911 but was not completed until 1930. Unfortunately, its creator died in 1931, only briefly enjoying its magisterial views and the ministrations of 23 staff. Drogo was designed to look as if it had stood in the ancient landscape for centuries. Construction was interrupted by the 1st World War which robbed Drewe not just of two-thirds of his workforce but also his eldest son and intended successor, Adrian. Second-born Basil, lived at the 600-acre property until he died and the family seat became the first 20th century property to be turned over to the Trust.

Julius Drewe had established his first shop in Liverpool in 1878 and then in London’s Edgware Road five years later. By 1903, the chain had 500 shops. The Home and Colonial brand was a fixture of the high street until 1961 when the loss of empire rendered the name out of date.

Relaunched as Allied Suppliers it was bought by Sir James Goldsmith but was later acquired by Argyll Foods which in turn became Safeway.

Castle Drogo is now open to the public again after six years of major conservation work.

11/AM/069

APRIL AND ITS HISTORY

April’s birthstone is the diamond and its flower is considered to be either the daisy or the sweet pea. Its two signs of the zodiac are Aries until the 20th and Taurus from the 21st.

1st April 1918 Royal Air Force is founded.  
2nd 1801 Admiral Horatio Nelson, aboard HMS Elephant, defiantly ignores orders from his commander-in-chief to withdraw his forces and proceeds to sink the pro-French French fleet off its home port of Copenhagen.

3rd 1721 Robert Walpole became the first Prime Minister of Britain.  
4th 1964 The Beatles fill the first five places in the US singles charts with Please Please Me, I want to hold your hand, She loves you, Twist and shout and Can’t buy me love.  
6th 1199 Richard the Lionheart dies from an infected wound while besieging Calais Castle.  
7th 1739 Travellers throughout England heaved a sigh of relief when the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin was hanged in York.  
8th 1838 Brunel’s new steamship, the Great Britain left Bristol on her maiden voyage to Boston.  
10th 1633 Bananas went on sale for the first time in a London shop.  
11th 1689 The joint coronation of William III, Prince of Orange and champion of Protestantism and his wife, Mary II took place in Westminster Abbey.  
14th 1983 First cordless ‘phone went on sale.  
15th 1755 Samuel Johnson published his dictionary which had taken nine years to compile.  
16th 1746 Charles Edward Stuart, Bonnie Prince Charlie, defeated at the Battle of Culloden.  
17th 1969 Voting age was reduced from 21 to 18.  
21st 1509 Henry VIII became King of England. Feast day of St George, the patron saint of England.  
23rd 1616 Death of William Shakespeare.  
24th 1858 At the second attempt, the biggest bell in the world, Big Ben, was finally ready for hanging in the clock tower of Westminster Palace, London.  
26th 1923 Marriage of the Duke of York and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon – later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, parents of Queen Elizabeth II.  
28th 1770 English naval explorer James Cook arrived in Botany Bay, Australia, the first European to do so.  
30th 1945 In his hideaway bunker in Berlin, Adolf Hitler shot himself. His wife of 48 hours and former mistress, Eva Braun, took a cyanide capsule. In accordance with Hitler’s instructions both bodies were burnt!
Notes from the Editor.
The next Newsletter should appear in July.
Please submit comments, ideas, information and articles for inclusion and also any questions that you may have. Somebody may well know the answer(s). Such contributions should be sent to The Editor, Chequers, Stone Cross Road, Wadhurst TN5 6LR or e-mailed to handew@waitrose.com before Monday 6th May 2019.

For sale:-
WHS cards £1.50 (including new designs)
WHS Notelets £3.50
WHS Postcards 50p

Publications:
Wadhurst – Then and Now £12
Victorian Wadhurst £9
The Last Prize Fight £4
Wadhurst Back in Time: 1901 – 1936 £15
Wadhurst’s Black Sunday: 9th May 1915 £10
Wadhurst in the Second World War £12
A Brief History of George Street £4
The Day Wadhurst Changed (20th January 1956) £9
Wadhurst: Town of the High Weald (2nd Edition) £12.50

Tom Lawson’s:
Diary of a Young Man 1940 £13.99
Wadhurst’s Princely Mansion – South Park coming soon.

All these publications are available at WHS meetings and from the Centre on Tuesday mornings, and from Barnett’s Bookshop.

The Editor has now been producing our Newsletter for five years and would appreciate some feed-back.

Is it what you want to read?

There was no response to her appeal in the last issue so maybe she will have more luck this time! (Hint!)

I asked:

• What would you like to see in your Newsletters?
• Which articles / items do you like/ not like?

Ticehurst’s ‘News and Views’ is an interactive publication which clearly functions extremely well and makes people want to read it. Would you like to make our Wadhurst History Society Newsletter interactive also by perhaps asking questions and offering responses or even contributing articles for potential inclusion?

RSVP Thank you.

To see more of our archives, consult www.wadhursthistorysociety.org

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