

# Your Haslemere

The Newsletter of The Haslemere Society

Autumn 2021

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## Chairman's welcome



*Chris Harrison*

Welcome to our Autumn 2021 newsletter.

As ever, we bring you a selection of articles on our areas of focus: planning, the environment and heritage.

Sonja Dullaway, Society trustee and a member of our planning group, reports on the overwhelming support given by the community to the Haslemere neighbourhood plan, and the opportunity to comment on Waverley's local plan part two. These two documents fulfil important and distinct roles in the planning process, and I believe it is helpful that the two are now broadly consistent with each other.

Howard Brown, writes about the importance of protecting our green spaces, an issue that is a huge challenge for the town, given the requirement to meet national planning targets. More than any other, this issue has the capacity to divide our community, and there is already some evidence of this. The Society necessarily has to take positions on these issues but is committed to doing so in a manner that is civil and respectful.

Haslemere's Beavers have received national attention, and as Bob Daniels reports, there has been a mixed start with the death of one of the Beavers. Nevertheless, their future looks extremely encouraging.

There are four articles on the heritage of the town. Christopher Hinton concludes from his own research, that Haslemere is celebrating its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This is a fascinating story that has not, to the best of my knowledge, been reported before. Another local story which is well known to parents and pupils at Amesbury school, but less well-known amongst the wider community is the connection between the school and Field Marshal Montgomery (Monty) to which I offer some insight ahead of the unveiling of a blue plaque to commemorate this association on 14<sup>th</sup> November.

This is followed by another article in my wife Shirley's regular series on the Lost Sons of Haslemere. She tells the story of second Lt Wilfred Unwin, a member of the publishing family and one of the few officers commemorated on the town's memorial. Finally, our editor and railway enthusiast, Gareth David, reports on efforts to safeguard our listed signal box.

Continuing our series of articles on the many other societies in our town, Judy Rix introduces the Haslemere Bowling club.

As ever, our appreciation goes to Di Keeley for compiling a list of forthcoming events in the town, and to Simon Mackie for another of his topical cartoons.

Do please provide us with feedback for future editions.

## Haslemere backs its Neighbourhood Plan

*By Sonja Dullaway*



HASLEMERE  
TOWN COUNCIL

### Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan: 2013 – 2032

*Beacon Hill, Critchmere, Grayswood,  
Haslemere, Hindhead & Shottermill*



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
 HASLEMERE  
VISION

As members will know from our recent emails, the Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan went to referendum on 7 October. This was the final step in a long and complex process, which included two previous consultations and a formal examination by the Independent Examiner.

The referendum was held by the same process as a normal national election and gave an overwhelming majority in favour of adopting the Plan – 2,392 votes (87.4%) in favour against 346 votes (12.6%) against. This means that the Neighbourhood Plan is now a formal part of the Waverley Borough Council planning process.

This is the culmination of more than seven years' work by local volunteers, organised through Haslemere Vision. As is usual with projects like this, a small group of people formed the backbone of the operation but many more were involved at different times and in different ways. This was a genuinely local initiative and it has allowed local people to be involved in key decisions about how planning will work in the local area.

The Haslemere Society's Trustees are all supporters of the Plan and welcome its formal adoption. But beyond that, the Society strongly supports the exercise of local democracy, which recognises that there will always be differences of opinion on such important issues as planning



but which resolves them through engagement and debate. The Trustees would therefore like to thank everyone who engaged in any way with this process, whether for or against.

### ***Progress on the Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2)***

The Local Plan is another part of the planning structure, setting out policies which developments need to meet and allocating sites for development to meet the required housing numbers. The Waverley Local Plan consists of two parts; the LPP1, which covers planning policies and is already agreed, and the LPP2, which contains the proposed allocated sites for development. Together these will replace the existing 2002 Plan.

In the Spring Newsletter, we provided an update on the LPP2. The LPP2 Pre-Submission Plan had been out to consultation between November 2020 and January 2021. At the time it was anticipated that this would be the version of the Plan that would be sent to the Secretary of State for an independent examination. However, a number of significant changes were subsequently proposed to the LPP2. These are available on the Waverley website at <https://www.waverley.gov.uk/Services/Planning-and-building/Planning-strategies-and-policies/Local-plan/Local-Plan-Part-2>.

The key changes from the previous document are:

- The removal of the previously proposed housing allocation at Red Court, Scotland Lane, Haslemere from the Plan – members may be aware that the application to develop this site was recently turned down by Waverley and is now subject to appeal;
- The addition of a new housing site allocation at The Royal Junior School, Portsmouth Road, Hindhead;
- Adjustments to the site boundaries of the proposed allocations at the Weyhill Youth Campus, Haslemere and the Old Grove, Hindhead; and
- Amendments to the proposed yields on the following sites: Haslemere Key Site, West Street, Haslemere; Weyhill Youth Campus, Haslemere; the Haslemere Preparatory School, Haslemere; Fairground Car Park, Haslemere; and, the Old Grove, Hindhead.

The removal of the allocation at Red Court has also led to a change in the proposed Haslemere settlement boundary, which now follows the line of Scotland Lane, as proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan.

**WBC is now running a consultation on these proposed changes to the previous plan – you have until 12 November to submit any comments on them.** Any comments made during the previous consultation that relate to other parts of the proposed LPP2 will be carried forward, so there is no need to resubmit them.

Should you wish to comment, you can find information on how to respond to the consultation on the Waverley website through the link given above.

## Protecting our green spaces

*By Howard Brown*



*View from Temple of the Four Winds on Blackdown*

One of the Haslemere Society objects is to protect the rural scenery around Haslemere. It is obvious to walkers that the route in or out of Haslemere is for the most part across green land. In many areas this is Green Belt, the highest protection; Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); Area of Great Landscape Value; or just nice green fields rolling down to the start of the South Downs National Park then back up the hill to Black Down. The area is actually The Surrey Hills AonB as stated on approaching roadside signs.

Unfortunately, with the current housing demands set by central government a number of developers have put forward proposals which will erode the green spaces with infill developments. These include proposals at Longdene (AONB & AGLV) and Red Court (AGLV bordering AONB). The north end of Haslemere has much more protection than the south, but this must still be monitored and maintained to ensure the green ring (or Donut) around Haslemere as it has been labelled, remains intact.

The Society recognises the need for new housing, including affordable housing, in and around the town. We have listened to and supported the community and groups such as Haslemere Vision, which generated our Neighbourhood Plan (see previous article). The key parts for the environment in the plan are the upholding of the Settlement Boundary and the divide between urban and rural which both play a part in the prevention of urban sprawl, plus the preference for brownfield over greenfield sites.

The Society embraces the Haslemere Town Council 'climate change emergency policy' which will protect the environment for our children and grandchildren. The Haslemere Society Environmental Group will continually monitor the surrounding Haslemere green areas and endeavour to keep the town as the members wish, with controlled growth and minimal impact on members' lifestyle maintaining the rich biodiversity we currently enjoy.

## Mixed fortunes for the Valewood beavers

*By Bob Daniels – Chairman, Black Down & Hindhead NT supporters*

The Wilder Valewood project, to which The Haslemere Society has generously contributed, is already delivering really encouraging changes to the ecosystem. The two beavers that were released earlier in the year (one male, one female) quickly settled in to their new home. In particular the female took over the release site pond and set about enlarging it by damming the existing outflow points.

This, relatively quickly, increased the size and depth of the pond, and as it increased in size water began to flow out at the next lowest point(s) creating new rivulets. The process continues to be repeated with the result that the pond is now much deeper and extensive and there are a number of new rivulets.

The male was also active further upstream and between them they have produced one large and four smaller ponds using four large dams, 12 smaller ones and a huge number of patch dams to prevent overflows. These are some of the first Beaver dams to be seen in South East England for 400 years.

The ground around the areas of beaver activity is becoming noticeably soggy as the water held up by the dams begins to seep into the surrounding soil. This is a great sign and this process will continue. We look forward to seeing the changes to the flora and fauna that will inevitably follow.

**The beavers have started to gnaw small and larger trees for food and material for dams**



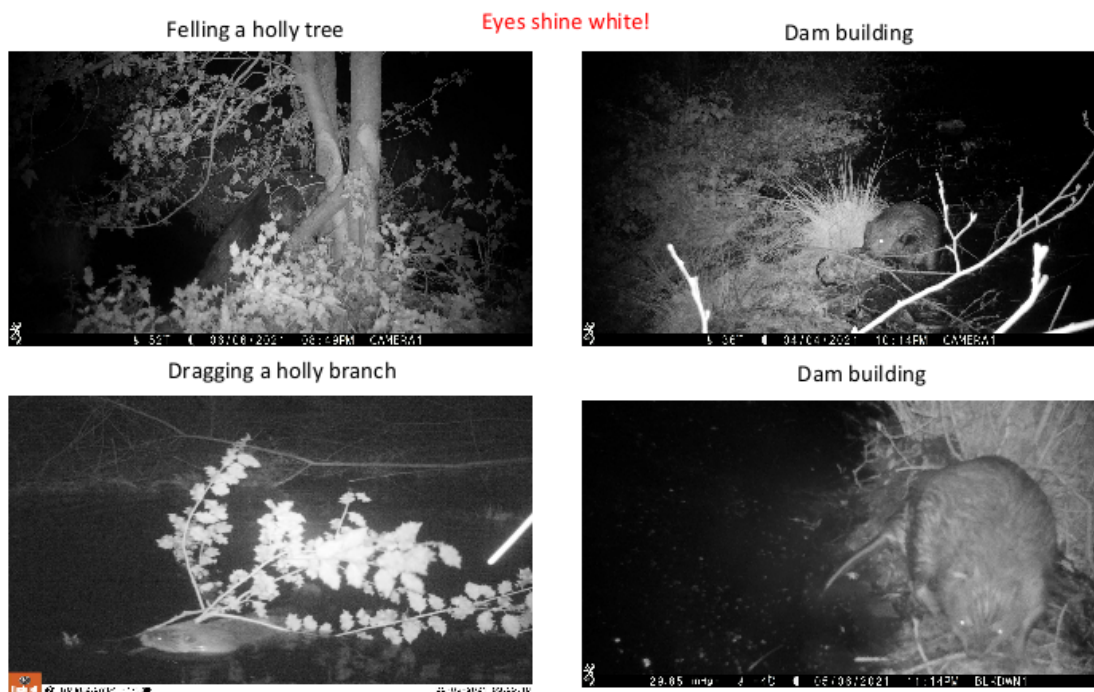
They also use sticks, foliage and other materials in the dams. Floating debris also helps the process

It is not unusual for there to be set-backs in experimental conservation projects such as these. Sadly, the male beaver has unfortunately died. We will know more when the post-mortem report is completed but it is most likely that he died of natural causes. There have been no escapes and the beavers have lived within the enclosure throughout their time here. He will be replaced in due course by a male from Scotland who is in need of a new home.

Various burrowing animals have presented the Rangers with a few challenges but modifications to the perimeter, developed on other sites which had similar issues, in the form of beaver proof tunnels have now been installed and seem to be working well.

Because beavers are secretive and crepuscular (mainly active in twilight, at dawn and dusk) they are unlikely to be seen by either the general public or the Rangers!

The beavers are therefore monitored 24/7 by trail cameras. These are used to confirm that the animals remain within the enclosure and are in good health. They are, of course, supplemented by regular patrols by the Rangers who also check the integrity of the fence. Within the Beaver enclosure seedling trees and shrubs continue to develop.



This project has attracted considerable interest from Research groups. There are active projects from Imperial College London (M.Sc.), Birmingham University (6 year Ph.D.) and a new project on Marsh Fritillary butterflies is being carried out by a locally-based student from the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, as part of his M.Sc. project.

On behalf of the project team and our neighbours we are asking people to still refrain from visiting, to give these remarkable wild animals the best chance of establishing themselves long term. I would like to thank all the National Trust members of the project team, but particularly David Elliott and his team, for their enthusiastic support and dedication to this exciting initiative.



## Haslemere is 800 years old (at least!)

*By Christopher Hinton*



This much about Haslemere is reasonably certain because a document exists that was issued by the government of King Henry III in 1221 referring to the “Market of Haslemere”. Whether it was a newly established market is not revealed.

There are some reasons to believe that this mention of our town may well point to its origins. Firstly, no earlier mention has yet been discovered. New towns and markets were being established all over England from about 1150 when the land came under reasonably stable government after a period known as “the Anarchy”.

There are written documents such as title deeds from around this time that tell us there were several farms in the vicinity. One of them, Piperham, had a private chapel that is referred to in 1184. It came within the parish of Chiddingfold at this time and so remained until 1868. The Chapel of Piperham may have been on the same site as St Bartholomew’s today. No archaeological evidence has been found for it being in any other place.

The royal instruction of 1221 directed the Sheriff of Surrey to give possession of the Manor of Godalming and the Market of Haslemere to the Bishop of Salisbury. The Manor was a valuable piece of real estate that had been promised many years before in exchange for a castle belonging to the bishops.

Its territory stretched from north of Godalming to the Sussex border. It may be that the site chosen for the market was just waste land being rather marshy ground and this may account for it being called Haslemere, a marshy place where hazel trees grow.

The King, Henry III was still a boy and a Council was ruling on his behalf. One member of that Council in 1221 was none other than the Bishop of Salisbury. It seems he bided his time about claiming the Manor of Godalming until the previous holder died which happened in 1221.

Bishops, like kings and barons, were always in need of money and Bishop Richard was no exception. Having been anointed Bishop of Salisbury in 1217, he had immediately set about moving the cathedral from the crowded old site of Old Sarum to the meadows beside the River Avon where he also laid out a new town, today's city of Salisbury. The foundation stone of the cathedral was laid in 1220.

Godalming itself may not have had a market in 1221 but it was close enough to Guildford where there was a well-established market. So if the bishop was wondering where in his new manor to set up a market, perhaps Haslemere seemed a good location being some distance from other existing markets in Midhurst, Farnham and Petersfield. There are signs that the town was laid out in the shape of a T, with a widened section of street for the market and plots laid out along it in a regular fashion. That layout is unchanged to this day.

History records that Bishop Richard was a highly respected figure both in the Church and in the Government and his legacy deserves to be better known. We are the inheritors of his vision that a town might flourish amid the hills and valleys of the south-west corner of Surrey.



*Sculpture on the west front of Salisbury Cathedral of Richard Poore, holding a model of the Cathedral in his hand.*

## Monty and the Amesbury connection

*By Chris Harrison*



On Armistice Sunday (14 November 2021) The Haslemere Society will unveil a plaque at Amesbury School to commemorate Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery's connection to the school, which served as his home from 1942-1948.

Monty's association with the school is well known to pupils and former pupils who receive a Monty bear on graduation, but it is less well known elsewhere in Haslemere and the full story has never before been told. I am indebted to Fay Foster who set me on the trail and a former boss, Jack Whinney who attended Amesbury during that time for his illuminating memories. Jack in turn introduced me to Charles Vertue who was a couple of years ahead of him at Amesbury.

The story begins with Monty's son, David. David returned to the UK with his mother in 1935 on an evacuation ship following a severe earthquake in Quetta in today's Pakistan, where Monty was serving. In January 1936, aged 8, he was sent to Amesbury and his mother returned to India. Betty tragically died after returning to the UK the following year.

She developed septicaemia after being stung by an unknown insect on a beach near Portsmouth. With Monty on active duty, David's subsequent school holidays were mainly spent with friends and relatives and in 1941 the house in Portsmouth that Monty and Betty had bought shortly before her death was bombed and totally destroyed.

On 2 May 1942 David entered Winchester College. The following day, Monty wrote to Phyllis Reynolds, wife of Amesbury headmaster Major Tom Reynolds, thanking them both for their pastoral care of David and asking if they could continue 'to be a base to which he could return ...while he is not at Winchester'.



Matters became more pressing when in August 1942, Monty was sent to North Africa at extremely short notice on the death of General Gott. On 8 August he wrote to Major Reynolds:

*"Will you and your lady wife take charge of David for me until I return? .....I am anticipating your acceptance of this request...so long as I am out of England".*

The most obvious choice of guardian might have been his step-daughter-in-law (Betty was a widow with two teenage children when he married her) but in the same letter he expressed the view that: *"she is not really capable of looking after his affairs"* and as to Monty's mother *"on no account is he to go (to visit her) She is a menace with the young"*.

Having no other home, on his first return to England in May 1943, he spent 10 days at the school where a room was made available for his private use. In this way, Amesbury became his home and remained so until 1948 when he moved to his own home, a converted mill in Isington in Hampshire. Of course, he was frequently away, but it is clear from his letters that he saw the school as a sanctuary where he could recuperate. After the war, three of his caravans were parked in the grounds and used by him as his private office.

The admirable Amesburian magazine's report on his May 1943 visit is worth quoting in full:

*'The School was greatly honoured. in May last to receive a visit lasting ten days from General Montgomery. The General had flown over from North Africa for a well-earned rest, and, as we now believe, to prepare and plan out his campaign in Sicily. The whole School lined the drive when the General appeared and heartily cheered him. He brought with him small presents for the whole School and also presented us with the portrait of Rommel, captured from the German General's Headquarters, as well as an autographed photograph of General Chiang Kai Shek and his own photograph. For several days the School buzzed with activity. British and Canadian Generals came to see him, and numerous reporters, photographers and cinema operators turned up. Many of the reporters and photographers were sent away, and only those officially sent were allowed in.'*

At this point in his career, Monty had become a celebrity, widely lauded as the man who had reversed the fortunes of war and saved the country. His discussions with generals concerning the forthcoming Sicily campaign are commemorated with a plaque on the small pavilion in the school grounds.

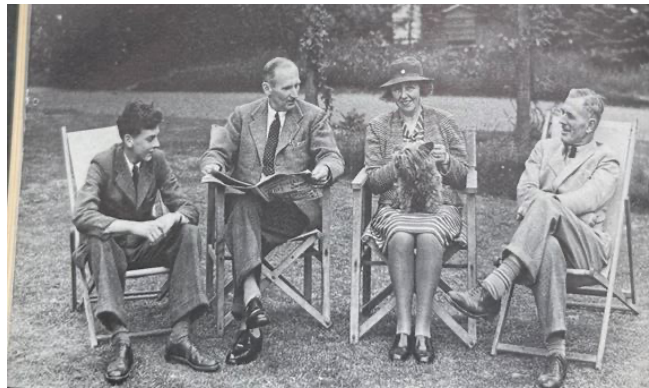
During this visit, he gave an account of his North African campaign which was widely reported in the press.

The first months of 1944 as he prepared for D Day gave him the opportunity to visit frequently as did the period after June 1946 when he was Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

The School's admirable magazine, The Amesburian, includes numerous accounts of his visits, watching cricket, attending boxing matches and prize giving and addressing the boys. Jack Whinney still owns an inscribed biro given to him by Monty for success in boxing.

One such visit took place the day before D Day, although it seems unlikely that he stayed the night and there does not seem to be any evidence to support the story that he left a note for the school matron saying that when she read it in the morning the invasion of France would have begun. In an earlier visit, in March 1944 he is reported as telling the boys

*'Amesbury was his home. He had no other home, and he could not have a better one. He and his boy David were taken in there at a very awkward time, and it had been his home ever since. '*



*With Son David and Tom & Phylis Reynolds at Amesbury*

Charles Vertue shares the recollection that Major Reynolds had maps of the 8th Army positions on the walls in the school that were updated daily and that Monty kept one of his caravans in the school grounds to which he repaired for solitude and work during his visits to the school. Monty even took several boys, including Charles up in an aeroplane as a treat, almost certainly the event recorded above.

Both Jack and Charles speak of the enormous affection that the boys held for Monty. As evidence of this thoughtfulness, Charles recalls that later when he was at Rugby School, Monty came to inspect the cadet corps at a time when Charles was in the sanatorium with an illness. Monty came in, sat down and talked to him, commenting that Major Reynolds would never have forgiven him had he not done so.

An anecdote in Monty's memoirs highlights the perils presented by the presence of such a high profile figure in Hindhead. He reports that when Commander of the Imperial General Staff he was considered at risk of being a target of a Jewish attack and that a policeman from Haslemere was sent to watch the Reynolds' house when he visited. He thought this unnecessary, but one day the phone rang:

*'My ADC, answering the telephone in my office heard a voice at the other end say: "Is that the War Office? This is the Stern Gang (a Jewish terrorist organisation) speaking." He replied: "Good. What can I do for you?" The Voice said: "Tonight, for the Field Marshall, a bomb". My ADC said: "Thank you, I will let him know". The Voice: "Are you trying to be funny?" The ADC said: "No, I thought you were." The Voice: "Did you? Then there will be a bomb for you too."*

*After which parting shot it rang off. No bombs arrived that night, or later. Perhaps it was because of the policeman ‘*

One of the richest sources of insight into Monty’s thoughts during his campaigns from 1942-45 is his correspondence with Major Tom Reynolds and his wife Phyllis, which are in the custody of The Imperial War Museum.

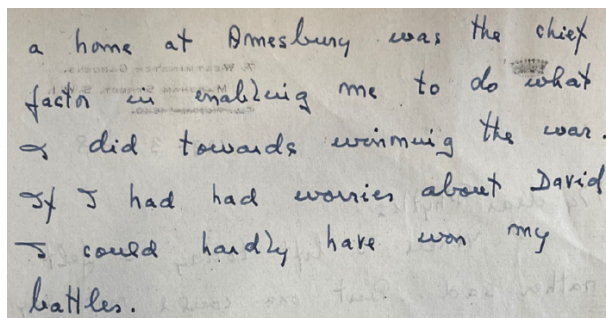
Between May 1942 and July 1945 he wrote 162 letters, at a rate of about one per week. These letters were sent by several means, using the fastest expedient at his disposal. Amusingly, he seems to have used Churchill and the King as postmen on their visits although such expedients could lead to confusion when they arrived ahead of his earlier letters or were delayed beyond his next letter.

As mentioned above, support for his son David was the basis of the relationship. However, the letters include many interesting anecdotes and observations.

It is quite striking how the warmth and intimacy of the letters evolve over time. On 12 October 1942 Monty writes to Major Reynolds *‘I think it is a most excellent idea that David should call you Uncle and Aunt. I suggest I should call your wife Phylis (sic), and she calls me Monty’*. The early letters are mostly addressed to Major Reynolds but from December 1942 onwards the correspondence is largely with Phyllis and the tone becomes less formal, more open. Gifts are exchanged including a pair of chamois underpants, presumably comfortable during winter campaigns.

It was the tragic death of Monty’s wife, Betty that led to his close association with Amesbury. The consequent support given by The Reynolds and the school enabled him to focus with single minded dedication on the task of leading the armies that defeated the Axis Powers in The Second World War. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to them all.

The importance of Amesbury to Monty is beautifully summed up in his letter of 29 March 1948, as he left Amesbury for the last time to take up residence at Isington mill. Members can read this letter, together with a more detailed account of Monty’s life and career, and his association with Amesbury, by downloading the more extensive pamphlet on our website, produced for the unveiling of the blue plaque, the Society’s fifteenth.

A photograph of a handwritten note on aged, slightly stained paper. The handwriting is in cursive, written in dark ink. The text is a personal reflection on the impact of Amesbury on the writer's military career. The paper has some faint, illegible markings at the top, possibly from a previous document or a stamp. The overall tone is nostalgic and grateful.

a home at Amesbury was the chief  
factor in enabling me to do what  
I did towards winning the war.  
If I had had worries about David  
I could hardly have won my  
battles.

*Extract from Monty’s letter dated 29 March 1948.*

## Lost sons of Haslemere:

*2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Wilfrid Peyto Unwin (29 Aug 1876-16 May 1916)*

*By Shirley Harrison*



*Wilfrid in 1915*

Wilfrid was born into the highly successful printing and publishing Unwin family on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1876, at Chilworth in Surrey. The Gresham Press had been founded by his grandfather Jacob Unwin fifty years previously in London, and was now run by his father George and uncle Edward. George and his wife Maria had just moved their growing family to Chilworth to live next to the new St Martha's Printing Works on the River Tillingbourne, in an idyllic spot, with St Martha's Church on the hill rising above it. With the birth of Wilfrid, there were eight children, with three more to come.



*St Martha's Printing Works 1880*

The Unwins must have been a lively and intelligent bunch, with most of them going on to interesting careers, some of them in distant lands. All five sons were sent away to school, with Wilfrid and his younger brother Harold going to Giggleswick Grammar School in Yorkshire. There Wilfrid decided upon a career in civil engineering, with a particular interest in railways. Two brothers, George and Gordon joined the family printing firm; brother Percy started as an engineer but went on to farm in Southern Rhodesia; brother Harold was a government "conservator of forests" in Nigeria and Cyprus. His parents were ahead of their time in the high value they also gave to girls' education, resulting in his sister Ethel becoming a doctor, Ida an artist, and Winifred setting up her own market gardening, poultry, and bee farming business in Churt.

There is a delightful family photo of nine of the siblings on what looks like a boating holiday:



*Top row L to R: Winifred, Percy, Wilfrid. Middle row: Olive, George, Ethel. Bottom row: Harold, Gordon, Ida. Photo provided by Paul Unwin*



After leaving school Wilfrid studied at the Imperial College of Technology in South Kensington, before gaining practical experience with the London and North Western Railway. He eventually became an associate member of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the era of rapid railway expansion was over in Britain, but was continuing apace in other parts of the world. In 1896, the British began to build the Uganda Railway for 660 miles from Mombasa to Kisumu (Port Florence) on the shores of Lake Victoria to protect our interests from the Germans in East Africa, an undertaking that was later to be named the “lunatic express” because of the huge difficulties involved. The project proved to be irresistible to Wilfrid, and in 1899 he set off to Nairobi, which at that time was just a seasonal swamp, to take part in the last half of the endeavour. Nairobi became the major depot on the line, and eventually evolved into the capital city of Kenya.



*Nairobi, 1899*

Fortunately for Wilfrid, the second stretch from Nairobi to Lake Victoria was as hazardous as the first, which had involved near impossible terrain, lack of water and supplies, extreme heat, malaria, and even man-eating lions. Nevertheless, after passing through the easy geography of the Rift Valley, the route had to pass through both very cold and very hot territory. The commissioner of Uganda noted: *“The construction team suffered badly from wet and cold conditions in the highlands of the Mau, and then from tropical fevers on the humid, swampy, flatlands of Kavirondo”*. The railhead finally reached Lake Victoria on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1901.



*The end of the line 20<sup>th</sup> December 1901*

The project had involved about 32,000 workers, many imported from India and approximately 2,500 men had died, mainly from disease. The railway's construction was a truly astounding feat of engineering, which laid the foundations for economic progress in the region.

In 1904 Wilfrid's parents, and his sisters Winnie and Olive, moved to the 18<sup>th</sup> century "Town House" in Haslemere High Street, one of the most beautiful houses in the town. They must have been very involved in the Congregational Chapel in Lower Street. George died in 1906, but Maria continued to live in the house until her death in 1927.

#### *Town House, Haslemere*

Just as his mother and father moved to Haslemere, Wilfrid emigrated to Canada where he was Divisional Engineer for both the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, two more epic railway endeavors.

The Canadian Pacific Railway, Canada's first transcontinental railway, had been built between Eastern Canada and British Columbia between 1881 and 1885, allowing passenger trains to travel from Montreal to Vancouver. Further branches were built between 1901 and 1928.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was constructed further north than the Canadian Pacific Railway, from Fort William, Ontario, to the Pacific Coast at Prince Rupert, British Columbia, between 1905 and 1914. The line from the east met the line from the west at Fort Fraser, British Columbia on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1914.

In 1910 Wilfrid obtained a commission as a British Columbia Land Surveyor, based at Vancouver. Presumably, this work was in some way connected to railway construction.

After the war broke out in August 1914, Wilfrid returned to England to enlist. He travelled by train across the continent to St John's, Newfoundland, before arriving at Liverpool on board the "Missanabie" on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, and spending what must have been a sombre Christmas in Haslemere at the Town House. His skills as a civil engineer and surveyor, with such extensive experience in railway building, would have been invaluable to the Army. The transfer of men, supplies, ammunition, and equipment to the Western Front required the construction of hundreds of miles of new railways, without which the British Army simply could not have functioned effectively for more than a few days. His obvious choice might have been to join the Royal Engineers, but on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1915 he was commissioned as a "temporary" second lieutenant in the 16<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles in Lurgan, County Down. The battalion had been formed in September 1914 as part of Haig's "New Army", and in January 1915 had become the "pioneer" battalion of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division. The pioneer battalions were a new concept in the British Army, being largely non-combatant and providing skilled labour for construction work. In July 1915, the battalion moved to Seaford, on the Sussex coast, before being deployed to France on 1<sup>st</sup> October, sailing from Southampton to Le Havre.

By October 12<sup>th</sup> Wilfrid had reached Raincheval, a small village fourteen miles NNE of Amiens, and about seven miles west of the firing line at this time. Here the battalion saw its first engagement, a dogfight between two planes, and many more of these followed during their stay. The war diary says that the village *"was in a shocking sanitary state, and being right down in a hollow, was practically a swamp."* It was their job to make improvements for the troops

billeted there, building stalls for horses, latrines, cook houses, bath houses and drying rooms. Later in the month parties were sent to the front line to put up barbed wire entanglements.

Wilfrid spent Christmas 1915 in Raincheval, before being moved west to Candas to build a seventeen mile long double tracked railway back east through Belle Eglise to Acheux. The railhead at Acheux was to be used during the British build-up for the Somme offensive. Before starting on the railway, a terminal station had to be built at Candas, then on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1916 the war diary reports that they *“carried on with the railway at the almost unprecedented rate of about 1100 yards of steel per day, this including sidings”*.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1916, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Unwin was mentioned by name in the war diary, being one of the officers doing the surveying work for the location of the proposed terminal at Acheux. The final spike was driven into the line as far as Belle Eglise on February 18<sup>th</sup>, but work continued on the station and sidings. The working parties were shelled several times that month, but there were no casualties.

March 1916 seems to have been rather jolly for the battalion with frequent after dinner entertainments: a three day boxing tournament, 4 days of cinema shows, 3 days of divisional “Follies”, a smoking concert (whatever that may have been) and a show by the Regimental Minstrel Troupe. The first trains started arriving at Belle Eglise on 20<sup>th</sup>, with munitions, supplies and troops arriving at short intervals.

On 20<sup>th</sup> April, Wilfrid, along with several other officers, was deployed “extra regimentally.” He was attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, a few miles further east on the frontline near Mesnil-Martinsart, to supervise building and fortifying shelters for the Divisional Artillery. The Battle of the Somme was less than three months away, and preparations were starting in this area. Sadly, he was not to return to the 16<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, and he did not see the line to Acheux finished.

His death was reported in a letter home on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1916, by his new commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Blacker of the 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers, rather shockingly briefly: *“Another Pioneer officer fell off his horse and has since died”*. There is no mention of it in the war diaries, but details can be pieced together from various obituaries. On May 12<sup>th</sup> he had been riding two miles behind the frontline near Mesnil with the Adjutant, when a shell exploded close to him, frightening his horse which threw him. The fall fractured the base of his skull. He was taken to the 4<sup>th</sup> Casualty Clearing Station at Beauval, but died without regaining consciousness four days later on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1916, and buried in Beauval Cemetery. He was 39 years old. The Times specifically reported that he was “accidentally killed,” which would suggest that it was a British shell.

The commanding officer of the 16<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, Lieutenant Colonel John Leader, wrote a touching letter to Wilfrid’s mother:



*“ He was one of my best subalterns, and was on the list for a decoration and also for promotion. He was very popular with officers and men and his loss is very greatly felt, and, apart from his professional worth, I do feel it very deeply myself. At the same time I and his brother officers are very proud of him, and know that he has fallen as he would desire to have fallen, and has passed over to the other side with a glorious band of gentlemen who have given everything for honour and for their country. He knows everything now, and the reason for everything; he is very sorry for you and, in a lesser degree, for us – in our sorrow.”*

Wilfrid died unmarried, but there is a family story, related by Paul Unwin, a relative living in Witley, that he was engaged to his cousin Ella Unwin, known as “Cinders,” sister of the publisher Sir Stanley Unwin. She was a certified physiotherapist, and died unmarried, aged ninety-three, in 1973.

### References

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The National Archives, WO 339/27605, service record of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. W. P. Unwin

## Securing the future of Haslemere Signal Box

*By Gareth David, Newsletter Editor*



Efforts to safeguard our Grade II-Listed signal box and maintain it as a working museum are gearing up, following confirmation from Network Rail that it will be closing sometime during 2024, along with the two other signal boxes on the Portsmouth Direct Line at Farncombe and Petersfield.

After an initial meeting in September with Network Rail, a formal expression of interest was sent by the Community Rail Partnership and a subsequent meeting between NR, the CRP and other interested parties was held at Haslemere station on 15 October, when detailed discussions began over a handover of the signal box.

Being a listed building, any work to secure or refurbish the structure of the signal box would potentially qualify for a capital grant from a body called the Railway Heritage Trust (RHT), which administers financial support for the preservation of listed structures on the national rail network and on preserved railways.

As part of our research into how the box might be used in preservation, I paid a visit in early September with Ken Griffiths, Chairman of Haslemere Community Station (The Hub) to a preserved signal box at Romsey, where we met Dick Hewett, who has been spearheading development of a site near Romsey station housing the box and a variety of signalling equipment for almost 30 years.

This site has become a renowned local tourist attraction and has even attracted professional railwaymen to train on its authentically working infrastructure.



Unlike the box at Romsey, which was moved to its current location when it closed in 1982, Haslemere Signal Box will remain in situ on platform 1, with the focus of discussions with NR and SWR being on how to establish a safe and secure rear access for future visitors to the box from the small station car park, as access from the station platform will not be allowed.

Members may recall a feature I wrote in the Society Newsletter three years ago, pointing out that Haslemere's is one of only three surviving signal boxes on the Portsmouth Direct Line, with the box at Petersfield also being Grade II Listed. What makes Haslemere unique among this trio, however, is in retaining its complete and original 47-lever frame, controlling signals and points between Liphook and Witley.

Since the 1960s a slow process of progressively re-signalling Britain's railway network has seen many thousands of signal boxes closed and replaced by larger signalling centres, and that will now see the Portsmouth Direct Line come under the control of what is called the Railway Operating Centre (ROC) at Basingstoke.

Our signal box was built by the London & South Western Railway (L&SWR) in 1895 and its lever frame also dates from the opening of the box. While the days of using the levers to pull wires that operated mechanical (semaphore) signals and point rods are long gone – Haslemere having been converted to colour light signalling in 1937 - the highly polished levers are now pulled to operate motor-worked points and modern LED colour light signalling.

When it gained its Grade II Listing in September 2013, the citation in support gave three principal reasons. Firstly, apart from the uPVC windows, which are sympathetic to the original design, the exterior is unaltered, while it retains its original Stevens (Railway Signalling Co.) lever frame and associated block instruments.

Secondly, it is a rarity, being the only remaining L&SWR Type 4 six-window bay design to survive and only of two platform-mounted Type 4 signal boxes. Finally, there is what is known as group value, since it forms part of a group of un-designated station buildings that includes the booking hall (1858), waiting rooms and lattice-girder footbridge.

## Introducing Haslemere Bowling Club

*By Judy Rix, President*



It is 100 years since the bowling club moved onto its present site at the Recreation Ground when the trustees of the estate of the late Sir John Hutchinson offered the land as a gift to the town for recreational use and as a memorial to the men of the town who served in the war. The club was formed in 1911 and it is believed that members played on a site near the present Haslemere Health Centre.

The first pavilion was very rudimentary and was replaced in the 70's using materials salvaged from prefabs near Woolmer Hill School. This was constructed by members but only consisted of a small social area with bench seats and coat hooks, a small 5ft by 4ft kitchen area and a chair was put outside with a bowl of hot water, soap and towel to be used by all after the game. The remains from the demolished 1970's building were used to construct the equipment.

Facilities were greatly enhanced in 1994 after obtaining generous grants and much fundraising resulting in the clubhouse we have today. We now have changing rooms, a large social area, well equipped kitchen and bar which have recently been redecorated. A considerable amount of the past work was done by members of the club and to this day we rely on the generosity of members both in time and financially to preserve and enjoy the pleasure of lawn bowls.

There is a widely held image that players dress in whites, ladies wear a pleated skirt and panama hats are essential. Occasionally, usually when celebrating a special event, we do wear whites but these may consist of shorts, trousers, capri pants etc with our club polo shirt. We

have moved with the times and the only essential clothing when starting to play the game is a pair of flat soft soled shoes.

Our green is square and has 6 rinks which can be played in N/S or E/W directions ensuring that wear and tear throughout the season is kept to a minimum. The green is maintained by a professional company but the rest of the grounds are maintained by us. We are members of Bowls England, Surrey County Bowls Association and Three Counties Bowls Fellowship and during the coronavirus pandemic were fortunate in being able to enjoy restricted play under their guidance, negotiated and ratified by the government. On becoming a member, free access is available every weekday afternoon and all day at the weekends during the season from April to October.

Organised practice sessions are held weekly, internal competitions are enjoyed and there is a full calendar of matches against other clubs, including league matches and county matches. In 2017 Haslemere BC won the prestigious Holbrook Cup. Coaching is available throughout the season on an informal basis and new members are encouraged to participate in friendly matches, gaining experience of other rinks and clubs. Newcomers to the game are warmly welcomed and soon gain confidence. Social events will resume soon and we look forward to many more years of fun and friendship.

*If you would like to know more, look at our website [www.haslemere-bowling.org.uk](http://www.haslemere-bowling.org.uk) or contact the membership secretary Peter Wallace [membership@haslemere-bowling.org.uk](mailto:membership@haslemere-bowling.org.uk)*

## Forthcoming events in Haslemere

*Compiled by Di Keeley*

We are fortunate in Haslemere to have an extremely wide and varied range of clubs, societies and other activities. We have briefly listed forthcoming events (mid November – end December 2021) of just some of these. Further information can be obtained from the respective websites.

**Haslemere Museum** [www.haslemeremuseum.co.uk/whatson/whatson.html](http://www.haslemeremuseum.co.uk/whatson/whatson.html)

Some, but not all events have an entrance fee and need to be booked in advance.

- **Exhibitions:** Suzanne & Alison – Emerging Colour. 6<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> November
- **Cards for Good Causes:** Charity Christmas cards sale. 20<sup>th</sup> Oct – 14<sup>th</sup> December
- **Talk:** Andree's War. 16<sup>th</sup> November 7.30 pm
- **Creative & Wellbeing Workshop:** A crafty Christmas. 17<sup>th</sup> November  
2.30 – 4.30 pm and 7-9 pm
- **Tea & Talk:** GladRags Project documenting pandemic year. 1<sup>st</sup> December 2.30 pm

### Family Events & Workshops:

- **Early Years** (stories; craft activities) for under 5s
- **Museum Explorers** (5-11 years) – monthly activities
- **Snail Trail:** 19<sup>th</sup> November 10.30 – 11.30 am
- **Gruffalo:** 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1.30 – 2.30 pm
- **Starry Night:** The stars & night sky, craft activities. 4<sup>th</sup> December 10.30 – 12 noon
- **Santa's Traditional Victorian Parlour:** Visit Santa. 5<sup>th</sup> December 11 am – 3 pm  
23<sup>rd</sup> December 10-11 am: special opening for families with a child on Autism Spectrum
- **Christmas Decorations:** 17<sup>th</sup> December 10.30 – 11.30 am
- **Christmas Crafts:** 21<sup>st</sup> December 10.30 – 12 noon
- **Haslemere Mummers:** 20 minutes traditional play. 18<sup>th</sup> December 11 am

**Haslemere Natural History Society** [www.haslemerenaturalhistorysociety.org.uk](http://www.haslemerenaturalhistorysociety.org.uk)

- **Lecture on Zoom:** Plant Adaptation: flowers & pollination. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2.15 pm
- **Field Meetings:** Signs of Winter on a Shillinglee Walk. 20<sup>th</sup> November 10.30am  
Winter Birds at Frensham Great Pond. 4<sup>th</sup> December 10.30

**Haslemere Town Council** [www.haslemeretc.org](http://www.haslemeretc.org)

- **Full Council meeting:** 18<sup>th</sup> November
- **Amenities meetings:** 9<sup>th</sup> December
- **Planning and Highways:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December

**The Arts Society Haslemere** [www.theartsocietyhaslemere.org](http://www.theartsocietyhaslemere.org)

- **Pots and Frocks:** The world of Grayson Perry. 16<sup>th</sup> November

**Haslemere Musical Society** [www.hmsoc.org.uk](http://www.hmsoc.org.uk)

- **Concert - Chorus and Orchestra:** 4<sup>th</sup> December

**Haslemere Gardening Society:** [www.haslemere-gardening-society.co.uk/events](http://www.haslemere-gardening-society.co.uk/events)

- **Talk:** In a different Field – conservation grazing. 24<sup>th</sup> November 7.45 pm

**Haslemere Christmas Market:** 5<sup>th</sup> December

**Haslemere Hall** [www.haslemerehall.co.uk](http://www.haslemerehall.co.uk)

- **Cinema screenings:** The Last Duel 18<sup>th</sup> November; Dune 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> December
- **Events via satellite:** Live screenings from the Royal Opera (Tosca 15<sup>th</sup> December); Royal Ballet (Nutcracker 9<sup>th</sup> December).
- **Kids' Symphonic Sundays :** 12<sup>th</sup> November, 19<sup>th</sup> December 10 am
- **Live Music:** Various including rock bands and Toyah Willcox
- **Kids Symphonic Sundays:** 21<sup>st</sup> October; 18<sup>th</sup> November
- **Theatre:** A Festive Flurry 16<sup>th</sup> December; Robin's Winter Adventure 20<sup>th</sup> December

**U3A Haslemere** [www.u3asites.org.uk/haslemere/contact](http://www.u3asites.org.uk/haslemere/contact)

The Haslemere U3A has 60 active groups – check with the website.

**Haslemere Library** [www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraries](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/libraries)

Open 9.30- 5pm Tuesday – Saturday

- Library Direct Home Library Service for vulnerable members of the community.
- Amenities such as Pebble Rhymetime, Storytime, Reading Groups and Digital Buddy are at present only available online via Facebook and YouTube.
- Contact the Library Service to make an appointment with a volunteer Tech Support buddy
- Visit Haslemere library for information about Surrey Nature Explorer Passport for children.
- Various online resources such as downloadable books for children; online jigsaw puzzles





You're not wearing a mask!