

Your Haslemere

The Newsletter of The Haslemere Society
Spring 2023

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Chairman's Welcome

Chris Harrison



Welcome to our spring 2023 newsletter.

With so much happening in the town in the next few months, we reverse our usual practice and bring "what's on" news to the forefront, moving our heritage articles towards the end of the newsletter.

Sarah Bain shares insight into an upcoming exhibition at the museum "Haslemere Artists 1859-1914: A Golden Era" and I then provide details of our plans for a summer outing to Winchester on August 8th for which plans are well advanced and invitations will be sent out next month.

Next, we share details on how to access information about the forthcoming Haslemere Festival and Haslemere's plans to celebrate King Charles III's coronation. Forgive me for including a plug for my talk about Montgomery of Alamein and Hindhead.

With visitors from Bernay, our twinned French town, due to arrive later this month, what better time for Sylvia Tibbs and Michael Bawtree to share the story of our Twinning Association and the work that it undertakes.

Gareth David shares the ambitious plans to develop the Link at St Bartholomew's Church into a thriving community hub – plans that are well advanced, but which will benefit from expressions of support from us all to secure some of the public funds that are accessible by the project. Please take a few minutes to lend your support.

We continue with an edited version of the fascinating talk given by Mick Bradford to members at our AGM in November.

Sticking with a focus on heritage my wife Shirley shares another story from her research into the men of Haslemere who lost their lives in the First World War, the story of Gunner Richard Ormonde Harper.

War is very much at the forefront of all our minds in these difficult times, and my dip into the Society archives during the second world war provides a heart-warming account of the steps taken by members and the committee to preserve some of the places that we all continue to enjoy today.

A notable omission from this newsletter is an article on planning, as our regular contributor and planning committee member, Sonja Dullaway is away exploring exciting places. Suffice to say that the Planning Committee has remained busy with areas of current and upcoming focus being proposals to further expand the Sturt Farm development, Red Court phase 2 and the Royal Junior School site.

These latter two are located in AONB, developments on which The Society object in principle. The Sturt Farm extension involves the destruction of a historical building of merit.

The town needs more housing, but developers do nothing to endear themselves to the community by destroying old buildings or, in the case of Cala Homes at The Royal Junior School site, putting forward carefully crafted but spurious arguments to short circuit the planning process: arguing that an environmental impact assessment on this sensitive site was not necessary. Happily, Waverley rejected this argument out of hand.

Another disturbing aspect of the developments referred to above is the potential loss of mature trees in and around the town, on top of significant loss already suffered from developments such as Red Court phase 1, Sturt Farm and The Heights School site. We understand that a network of tree wardens is being established in the town and applaud this development.

Anyone can apply for a Tree Protection Order and Friends of the Earth have published a very useful guide: [How to protect trees: a guide to Tree Preservation Orders | Friends of the Earth](#).

As ever, we end with a topical cartoon from Simon Mackie, which on this occasion plays nicely to the theme of my last paragraph.

Enjoy the newsletter.

Chris Harrison
April 2023

Haslemere Artists 1859-1914: A Golden Era

By Sarah Bain, Honorary Vice President, Haslemere Educational Museum

An exciting new exhibition at Haslemere Educational Museum entitled Haslemere Artists: A Golden Era, tells the story of how so many artists came to live and work in our area between 1859 and 1914. Their paintings and illustrations will be on display from 9th May until 24th June.

Their story begins with the Portsmouth line from Waterloo reaching Haslemere in 1859. Artists were amongst the first newcomers to 'discover' the charm of our newly accessible corner of South West Surrey. The arrival of the railway also happened to coincide with a golden age for artists. Not only was there unprecedented demand for paintings but also a vastly increased demand for illustrations for books and magazines.



Chase Farm by Frank Walton

Amongst the artists who came to live in Haslemere and Grayswood were the engraver, Josiah Whymper RI (1813-1903), the landscape artist, Cecil Lawson (1849-1882), the watercolourists Helen Allingham RWS (1848-1926) and Walter Tyndale RWS (1855-1943) and the etchers, Axel Haig RE (1835-1921) and Hedley Fitton RE (c1858-1929). Whymper, took the Town House in Haslemere High Street in 1859. He became an accomplished watercolourist as well as running his engraving business. Described as the most promising landscape artist of his generation, Lawson lived at Heathedge, Haslemere High Street, from the late 1870s until his untimely death from tuberculosis in 1882. One of his most celebrated works, *The August Moon*, was painted at Black Down. From the early 1870s, as disquiet about the impact of industrialisation gathered pace, small watercolours of charming, if unrealistic, pastoral scenes became one of the most popular genres. The tumbledown cottages and country lanes of the Haslemere area provided perfect subject matter for these paintings.

One of the undisputed standard-bearers of this genre was Allingham. In 1880, she and her husband, the poet William Allingham, rented Lawson's cottage, Heathedge, and so loved the area they moved to Sandhills, Wormley in 1881. It was while living in this area that Allingham began to paint the delightful old cottages which made her so successful.

Tyndale moved to Haslemere in the mid-1880s. Here, helped by Allingham, he learnt to paint in watercolour, thus establishing his career. He made his name with his watercolours of Middle-eastern subjects.



Haslemere Village by Byron Cooper

Etchings were an extremely popular art-form from the 1860s. Haig and Fitton were probably the most successful etchers of their generation and both lived here: Haig in Grayswood, where he designed the church, and Fitton in Weydown Road.

Such was the strength of the area's flourishing artistic community that, by 1894, it established an art society, the Haslemere Society of Artists, of which Whympers, Allingham, Tyndale and Haig were founder members. The Society, now known as the Haslemere Art Society, still thrives today.

Thanks to a generous donation, which has allowed the Museum to fill some gaps in its collection, and some loans, this exhibition will be crammed full original paintings and illustrations by all the artists mentioned above, and many more, and is well worth a visit. Haslemere Educational Museum is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10.00am until 5.00pm. Supporting talks and guided tours can be booked at www.haslemeremuseum.co.uk or 01428 642112.

Society 2023 Summer Outing

Chris Harrison



Following the success of last year's visit to The Watercress Line and feedback from members that you would like to see more outings we are planning a visit to Winchester on Tuesday 8th August.

Plans for the day are still being finalised but the day is expected to look something like this:

- 10.00am: Depart Haslemere
- 11.30am: Guided tour of Winchester Cathedral, one of the world's finest largest medieval cathedrals in Northern Europe
- 1.00pm: Lunch in the Cathedral Café
- 2.30pm: Guided tour of Winchester Great Hall, one of the finest surviving aisled halls of the 13th Century
- 3.45pm: Depart for Haslemere
- 5.00pm: Return to Haslemere

The historic capital of Anglo-Saxon Wessex, the diocese of Winchester, as the map shows, was the most powerful diocese in England after the Norman Conquest.



William installed his friend and relative Walkelin as the first Norman Bishop of Winchester in 1070, and in 1079, Walkelin began the construction of the Cathedral. Further expansion and style modifications took place in the 12th, 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries with modifications to the interior in the 17th and 19th Century.

The magnificent Great Hall is all that remains of Winchester Castle. The Hall boasts a round table which claims to be the iconic Round Table of Arthurian legend.

Join us on the day. Pricing will aim to cover costs for the outing and invitations will be sent out in May.

Highlights of the Haslemere Arts Festival and Coronation Weekend



HASLEMERE FESTIVAL

Festival

Absolutely choreographed by society member Hamish Donaldson, the larger than ever Haslemere Arts Festival, supported by radio partner BBC Surrey will run from 13th to 29th May, 2023:

Evening Concerts include Classical, Jazz, Folk, Opera, Choral, Dance Orchestra, Mates & Godfree.

Weekend and Family events include Little Lumpy Cycling Sportive, the RSPCA/Cub Scouts Dog Show and Julia Donaldson OBE of Gruffalo fame.

Anniversary Talks include Who wrote Shakespeare? History of Haslemere Hospital, Finding Puccini, Crazy for Tulips, The Vietnam War, The Real Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang

Weekday Topical Talks, speakers include Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt, Rt Rev Dr Christopher Herbert; subjects include Grange Park Opera, Petworth House, Clandon Park, English Cathedrals.

We have of course to mention that our Chairman, Chris Harrison will be giving a talk on Viscount Montgomery of Aalamein and Hindhead at 11.00am on Thursday 11th May

Coronation Weekend

The town is celebrating the Coronation of King Charles III on Saturday 6th May.

The town will be decorated with flags.

Haslemere Chamber of Trade are erecting a Coronation Arch at both ends of the town.

The Royal Society of St George are having a window dressing competition. Judging takes place on 6th May and prizes given on 8th May at the Lion Green event.

On Saturday 6th May, Excelsis Choir will be performing music fit for a royal occasion in St Christopher's Church at 7.30 pm (<https://excelsis-choir.co.uk/>).

On Sunday 7th May, there will be a civic service in St Bartholomew's Church at 11am. Also on Sunday 7th May, residents are encouraged to organise their own street parties.

On Bank Holiday Monday 8th May, there will be a carnival procession to Lion Green with a village fête on the Green, with funfair, hot food, and festival bar. The evening will end with a laser light show on Lion Green.

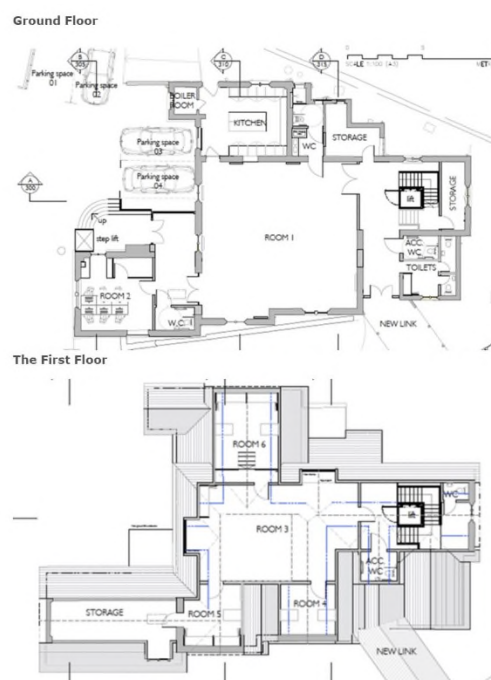
Further details can be found at <https://haslemerefestival.org.uk/>

Reinventing The Link building at St. Bart's Church

By Gareth David

Many Haslemere Society members will already be aware of ambitious plans to transform a building known as The Link, which stands alongside St. Bartholomew's church, into a Community Hub that will give provide a much-needed space for social events, meetings and exercise classes, as well as providing a new home for essential services such as Citizens Advice and Crossways Counselling.

The Link project team has been consulting the Society over planned changes to the structure of the building, which proposes a reconfiguration of the existing single-storey building, which has severe limitations on its use. It aims to provide a new first floor with meeting spaces and counselling rooms and new spaces and facilities on the ground floor enabling use by a number of occupants and groups at any one time.



In developing its ambitious plans, the team has consulted many local organisations and has concluded that there are insufficient facilities offering multiple small rooms for consultation/ counselling in Haslemere. Existing spaces for such work are well-used but oversubscribed, so this transformation of The Link would meet an identified need to support those in our local community who are struggling with money/ loneliness and or mental health.

Besides extensive consultation with local community groups and organisations, the team has been working hard in preparing a Planning Application, having already undertaken a Bat Survey and Archaeological "desktop review", with the aim of submitting the necessary application and supporting documents during April. The team hopes to get a response from Waverley's planning team in June.

To progress its plans the team initially made an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, but it was unable to provide the level of funding being sought (£1.4m). Whilst the Lottery fund thought it good project and liked the supporting case presented, the feedback was that other sources of funding should be sought before approaching them, notably the YOUR FUND SURREY (YFS).

YFS has £100 million of funds to spend across Surrey over a five year period on capital projects such as community buildings, so is an obvious source of potential funding. Discussions with YFS have indicated that The Link is an eligible project, and the team has also secured the vital support of County Councillor John Robini.

Another potential source of funding is Waverley's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is funded by housing developers when they apply for Planning Permission. Given the encouraging feedback to its initial application, the team may also go back to the National Lottery asking for a smaller sum than was originally applied for.

To progress its application to YFS, the Link team now needs as many people as possible – you, your family, friends, neighbours - to register their support on the **YFS** website and has conducted an extensive leaflet drop on the High Lane estate and in the vicinity of St. Bart's to seek support.

Members who have not already done so can find more information on the parish website www.haslemereparish.org/link where they will find a short video with representatives of key users (Crossways Counselling, Citizens Advice Waverley and Hear Here) and a link to the YFS website, on which to express support.

Introducing Haslemere & District Twinning Association

By Sylvia Tibbs and Michael Bawtree



Bernay 1985



Haslemere



Horb 1991

Though there is some debate about the exact date for the start of the Twinning movement it really took off soon after 1945, aiming to build links and exchanges between towns and their citizens in order to promote greater friendship and understanding after the years of conflict.

The Haslemere Association started in 1985 when a link was established with Bernay in Normandy. In 1991 Horb am Neckar in Germany was twinned with Haslemere. Since then a steady pattern of reciprocal visits has taken place and this year members of the Association will be hosting visitors from Bernay in Normandy in April and in June we will be going to visit our friends in Horb.



Just before a Bernay v Haslemere Ten-Pin Bowling contest, September 2022

The visitors from Bernay this year, 46 people including 10 under 18s, will all stay with host families in and around Haslemere for four nights, arriving and leaving by coach together. This is the largest number that Haslemere has ever hosted and local families have been very supportive in finding extra room in their homes to accommodate all these guests.

During the visit some entertainments have been arranged by the Association for all the visitors, such as a cocktail party at a private address, a canal boat tour on the Basingstoke canal and a celebration dinner at Milford Golf Club. This programme allows plenty of time for the Haslemere hosts to arrange site seeing and other activities of their own choice.

Language does not need to be a barrier; many of our Haslemere hosts speak some French, though others do not and many of the French speak little or no English. This does not

seem to spoil an otherwise happy visit. Needless to say, most of the German 'twinners' are proficient in English.



Our Horb friends leaving LHR at the end of a fabulous visit, June 2022



Distinguish the German from the English, if you can!

The reciprocal home hosting which is the norm for Haslemere has created many strong individual friendships, with families in Haslemere, Horb and Bernay remaining in contact throughout the year and visiting individually as well as through Twinning.

This is not necessarily the pattern with other twinning associations, where visitors are sometimes accommodated in hotels. Experience indicates that this does not produce such robust connections because interactions remain largely group rather than family based.

In between the French and German visits the Haslemere Association runs some popular events for the local membership. The Haslemere Association is very largely self-funding, so annual events such as a 'Bastille Day' BBQ, a light-hearted but rigorous Quiz night and a New Year drinks party are substantial contributors to the fundraising needed to ensure that our French and German visitors can be appropriately entertained.

Further information can be found at www.haslemere-twinning.org.uk where there is also a link to membership information.



The French coach is always made welcome at the Haslemere Fire Brigade HQ



This one says it all!

Last Flight of the Night Stalker

At the Society's AGM on 11 November 2022, local historian and personality Mick Bradford gave members a fascinating and illustrated talk about a WWII plane crash in Haslemere that he has spent a lifetime researching. For those who may have missed it, this is an edited version of his talk



"This has been a labour of love and many times I have felt like throwing in the towel but there has always been something that has brought me back to the story and the rewards have been fantastic. I never knew that I would find out as much as I have about this accident and will try to keep facts and figures to a minimum.

"Like all good detective stories, at the end the detective comes and tells you what has happened and who was responsible. But this is going to be a bit different and I am going to give you the solution before we start. This story was a complete mystery to me in 1971 when Bert Stacey, who had been the projectionist at the Rex Cinema, told me the story, and it stuck with me for all the years until I retired and did what I had promised Don by researching the background.

"This is the story of the last sortie of Douglas Boston III aircraft AL470 from 534 Squadron, based at Tangmere in West Sussex. This experimental twin-engine aircraft had been modified with a huge searchlight fitted in the nose to help night fighters spot enemy bombers engaged in the Blitz, but encountered engine trouble over Hindhead, and crashed in Shottermill on 22 September 1942, with the loss of three lives.

Take off from Tangmere

"AL470 was in the hands of Flying Officer Michael Winter, and the flight had taken off from Tangmere at 5.40pm alongside a Hurricane IIC fighter, with the pair planning to undertake Airborne Interception practice (AI). This was to test the radar system in the aircraft by using the Hurricane as the target, in preparation for an operational patrol later that night.

"The process normally took about half an hour, receiving general vectors from Ground Control at Durrington and converging vectors from his radar operator, who was seated in the back of the Boston. This was Flight Sergeant Wilfred 'Jimmy' Cleall, whose job was staring at a tiny screen behind a padded visor and interpreting returns from the target, which he passed on to the pilot as directions. Michael and Jimmy were a dedicated team who always flew operations together.

"After three minutes they had reached their practice height of 10,000 ft. There was a broken layer of cloud over Tangmere and the coast, but it was more solid to the north. RED 2, the Hurricane pilot, who was also the Flight Commander for the practice, called over his radio: "HELLO RED 1, RED 2 HERE. NEGATIVE. REPEAT, NEGATIVE. ENGINE OVERHEATING AFTER THE CLIMB. GOING BACK TO MOTHER [code for Base]. SUGGEST YOU DO THE SAME. OUT."

"With that, he gave a salute-like wave, peeled off and rolled into a downward dive, disappearing into the patchy cloud below. Underneath, a cold grey sea lashed white breakers against the Bognor shoreline.

"Michael called Ground Control: "HELLO CONTROL. RED ONE HERE: RED TWO US. ANY TRADE FOR ME?" "HELLO RED ONE, CONTROL HERE, NOTHING DOING I'M AFRAID." Michael fumed. He had returned from nine days' leave that very afternoon and felt he needed the practice. Jimmy had also been away for a similar time and was likely to be 'rusty' too.

A third person is on board

"His displeasure suddenly ceased. He had momentarily forgotten he had a passenger, lying on his stomach in the small compartment above and behind the pilot's seat. This was his best friend, Pilot Officer John Lindley, also the squadron adjutant, who split his administration duties with RAF Ford, seven miles to the east. Michael often took John up with him and Jimmy on AI practice flights and dropped him off at Ford before returning to Tangmere.

"John had no intercom, which meant the noise from the engines made any voice communication between them virtually impossible. Michael looked enquiringly over his shoulder and stuck up his thumb: a smiling John reciprocated. It was none-too warm at this altitude and Michael worried about him, but he was wearing his RAF greatcoat and didn't seem to be complaining.

"Suddenly, Jimmy cut in on the intercom: 'SKIP! IN YOUR TEN O'CLOCK! LOW! IN AND OUT OF CLOUD! BLIMEY! IT LOOKS LIKE A JU 88!' Michael wheeled the Boston round in the direction of the 'Bogey'. (unidentified aircraft). "LET'S GET AFTER HIM JIMMY! ANYTHING ON THE MAGIC EYE?"

"YES SKIP, IT'S STRONG! STAY ON THIS HEADING!" Michael reined in his excitement; if it was an enemy aircraft he'd better not get too close as the Boston was unarmed.

"GOOD WORK JIMMY! CONTROL MUST BE ASLEEP! WE'LL JUST CHASE HIM FOR A FEW MILES. I'LL STAY HIGHER AND KEEP BACK; SEE IF YOU CAN KEEP TABS ON HIM!"

"Michael descended towards the cloud layer but his intention was to keep out of it, as the Turbinlite Boston, with flat searchlight nose and heavy load of batteries, was extremely difficult to manoeuvre on instruments. He turned to the prone passenger behind him and

held up five fingers, indicating five minutes. A smile and an upward thumb acknowledged it was OK.

The mystery target disappears

"HE'S PULLING AWAY SKIP," cried Jimmy. "FASTER!" In normal circumstances, Michael would have put the nose down to speed up, but the cloud layer, now solid, was only a few hundred feet below. Determined to avoid going into it, he did the only thing available to him; he opened up the throttles and increased the RPM. The speed started to build, but Jimmy kept calling, "FASTER! FASTER!"

"Concentrating hard, he ramped up the power further. What the devil were they following? He looked at his watch: 17.50. Strange; the dial was blurred! So were the instruments!! His eyes were fine; he could see the clouds and the horizon clearly. The penny dropped! It was engine vibration and it went right through the airframe.

"He reset the RPM, throttled back, and decided it was perhaps time to go home, giving John a hitch-hiker's thumb signal over the shoulder. The shaken passenger nodded in approval; the vibration had been most disconcerting! Michael flicked the intercom switch: "WE'RE GOING HOME JIMMY!"

"THANK GOD FOR THAT!" came the voice from the rear cockpit. "I COULDN'T MAKE OUT A THING ON THE DISPLAY! IT'S ALL GONE HAYWIRE!"

"Michael banked the Boston to bring it round on to a southerly heading. Suddenly, the aircraft started diving, picking up speed rapidly. He pulled back on the yoke, but it wouldn't budge. His mind raced. What on earth could be wrong? Then the cloud bank enveloped them.

"Inspiration: he tried the trimmer. It was working and the dive shallowed out a little. Could he use it to level the aircraft back up? The trimmer was powerful but over-using it could result in an overstressed airframe. As there was no alternative, he nervously continued as the speed increased further.

Problems on board

"Jimmy called out urgently on the intercom. "ONE OF THE BOXES SKIP!" (seven radar boxes were crammed into the tiny space underneath his display) "IT'S COME LOOSE! I CAN SEE IT! IT'S JAMMING THE CONTROL WIRES! I THINK I CAN FREE IT." He had to loosen his harness to reach the box. "GOT IT SKIP!" He was obviously struggling and tried to free it with the help of his boot: "JUST...PULLING IT."

"The effect of Jimmy freeing the jammed cable was about as dramatic as it was possible to get. The diving Boston came out of cloud only a few hundred feet above the terrain below. Now, with the elevator control free and the trimmer wound fully back, the aircraft shot violently upwards like a rocket, the resultant G force causing all three occupants to black out.

"Up, up it went through the cloud layer into a full loop; nine and a half tons of aircraft. At the top of the loop, the G disappeared and Michael regained consciousness. The Boston was now pointing downhill again, ready to repeat the manoeuvre, but he reacted swiftly to get it under control; the last thing he needed was a spin, which in a Boston was fatal!

"Flying completely blind, and using every ounce of his flying skills, he wound the trim forward, at the same time leaning with all his weight on the control column to prevent another skyward excursion.

Fire on Board

"After what seemed like an age he felt the pressure on the yoke easing, and this gave him hope he would come out of the cloud at a shallow enough angle to recover. "FIRE IN THE BACK HERE SKIP!" The detached cables from the disconnected box were arcing and sparking! "MY WATCH, MY WATCH!" cried Jimmy (it was a present from his mother). "IT'S COME OFF!" Michael heard him, but was too busy to answer.

"The Boston broke cloud for the last time – four hundred feet above Hindhead Common. Michael winced. They were doomed; he would never pull out in time. But wait. There was a valley. He could see the ground falling away between two ridges. It was his only chance and he went for it. The valley slope was just enough to keep the aircraft from smashing into the ground.

"Brushing tree tops and skimming the roofs of houses on the way down, Michael finally felt the Boston levelling off. There was a built up area ahead and he realised he now needed to apply power or he would mush straight into it. If he could do that, they would be saved. He swiftly opened the throttles to full power and instantly the vibration came back again, this time more vigorously.

"Encouragingly however, the aircraft flattened out – one hundred feet above Shottermill School. At least it was under control; soon it would be climbing away and in no time at all, they should be safely back home at Tangmere.

Starboard engine lost

"But it was not to be. At that precise moment, Michael Winter's luck finally ran out. With an almighty sickening bang, the starboard engine, its propeller turning at full power, tore away from its mountings, carving its way through the cockpit. Streaming vapour, it shot through the air like a naval shell, going on to fall through the roof of the Rex Cinema in Shottermill.

The sudden loss of the engine, combined with the stresses on the airframe in recovering from the dive, had caused the aircraft's structure to fail. The Boston broke up over the grounds of Holy Cross Hospital (now Priors Wood estate) and what was left of the fuselage, containing Michael, Jimmy and John, fell onto the Hindhead Road near the Shottermill Club, where the pedestrian crossing is today. All three were killed in the crash.

"In his report of the accident, Vernon Brown, Chief Inspector of the Air Ministry's Accidents Investigation Branch, concluded: "The cause of the accident was the breaking away of the starboard engine – one of the bearers of which was defective – during high stressing by the pilot of the aircraft whilst recovering from a dive out of cloud. 'The sudden loss of weight forward and the consequent violent change of direction in the aircraft's flight path resulted in complete collapse of the aircraft structure.'

"The defect he mentioned was in the upper outboard engine bearer, part of the starboard engine mounting, and was in fact a fracture, caused by severe local overheating. This was due to regular electrode clamping on the bearer, a practice almost certainly employed for the purpose of charging the 48 Turbinlite batteries.

Several months later, it was discovered that there was a critical RPM range that had to be avoided in the Boston at all costs, as severe damage could result. This was rectified in later versions, as was the practice of running control cables through the rear cockpit.

The Turbinlite programme was abandoned three months after this incident. Conceived in the dark, desperate days of 1940, it held the line until better aircraft and equipment came

along. Viewed in hindsight, it was a failure, almost a crackpot one; yet, for all its shortcomings, it provided crews with invaluable and indispensable experience, which eventually would win the war for the Allies in the night skies over Germany.

Three friends and heroes who died together

The crews realised that they were being used as reserves, but they carried on, because it was their duty; and above all they wanted to be the best at their jobs. The three men in AL470 were all volunteers and joined via the RAF VR scheme.

Michael Winter, 22, joined the RAF straight from college and was an outstanding pilot. Jimmy Cleall, 27, a pre-war insurance agent, was regarded as one of the best Radar 'Ops' in the unit, and John Lindley, 34, gave up a top job with the Midland Bank simply because he wanted to 'Do his bit'.

There were many such accidents in the Turbinlite squadrons, and each one provided many valuable lessons for the future. It is such a pity that three decent young men had to die seemingly so needlessly, but without question, the lessons learned from their tragic last sortie saved many more lives in the remaining years of the war.

When 16-year-old Haslemere Army Cadet Don Hill became the first person to arrive at the crash scene he was given various clearing up duties by his captain. Lying very near the wreckage he discovered a man's wrist watch: the time had stopped at 5.51pm.

The Lost Sons of Haslemere

**Gunner Richard Ormonde Harper (23 Dec 1883 – 27 Sep 1918)
194730 - 144th Siege Battery - Royal Garrison Artillery**

By Shirley Harrison



Badge cap of the royal Garrison Artillery

Ormonde, as he was known, was born in East London at 255 Old Kent Road on 23rd December 1883, to Ruth and Charles Harper. His mother was Irish, which probably explains his unusual forename. He was the second of two sons. His family had a medical background: his grandfather John Harper and uncle Henry Harper were both G.P.s in Stowmarket, Suffolk, while his aunt Annie Harper was married to another G.P. in the same town.

His father Charles is variously described as surgeon, medical practitioner or apothecary in the records. Charles died in 1898, apparently leaving Ormonde's mother in financial difficulty. She moved to Carlton Colville, now a suburb of Lowestoft, in Suffolk, where she worked as a live-in housekeeper to Ernest Gage, a nursery gardener and florist. Ormonde went with her and was apprenticed to her employer, along with five other boys. Ormonde's older brother Charles decided to take a more adventurous path and emigrated to Canada to join the North West Mounted Police in Yukon.

By 1911, when Ormonde was 27, he had moved with his mother to Haslemere, to a house called "Wyoming" in College Hill Terrace, which is now numbered 10. He was working in the Oaklands Nursery Gardens in Tanners Lane, which stood on the site of the modern Oaklands housing development. It was in a perfect location for a nursery garden: close to the town centre, with a stream bordering it on two sides. One of the trainee nurserymen, Arthur Nevile, lodged in Ormonde's house. Ormonde must have been a capable and skilled worker, as by 1916 he was a manager at the nursery. He and his mother moved to Electra Buildings, a newly built block of flats and shops in Wey Hill, which is now named Clay Hill House.



Workers picking tomatoes in Oaklands Nursery



The greenhouses of Oaklands Nursery in Tanners Lane are visible in this old aerial photograph

When the Military Service Act was passed in January 1916, conscription was imposed on all physically fit, single men aged 18 -41, excluding ministers of religion, teachers and some industrial workers. Men in certain other occupations could obtain a certificate of exemption from their local Military Tribunal on the grounds that they were "more useful to the nation in their present employment", or had exceptional business or domestic situations, or were conscientious objectors.

Ormonde and his co-workers were initially granted certificates, but unfortunately, in November of that year the rules changed, removing nurserymen from the exempt list. The proprietor of Oaklands, Mr. C. Lywood, now faced possible financial ruin by the loss of all his younger skilled workers.

On 8th November 1916, a meeting of the Local Military Tribunal was held at Haslemere Hall, with Mr. Allen Chandler J.P. in the chair, plus five other Haslemere men, and Major H. N. Webb present as the Military Representative. The minutes recall:
"Richard O. Harper, Market Gardener and Fruit Nursery Manager of Electra House, Haslemere. Application by Chief Military Representative for a withdrawal of the certificate granted this man by the Military Authorities on the ground that his occupation had ceased to be one of the certified occupations. As the ground was not quite clear, the case was adjourned for a week. The Clerk was instructed to call the Chief Military Representative's attention to the case of"

Infuriatingly, the next page is missing. It looks as if the local men on the Tribunal did their best to argue for Ormonde's continuing exemption, but at the meeting the following week, Major Webb got his way:

"Richard Ormonde Harper, 33, of 3 Electra Buildings, Haslemere. Foreman of Market Garden and Fruit Nursery working. Application by employer Mr. C. Lywood, Oaklands Nurseries, Haslemere on grounds of business obligation, also that the man was employed in a certified occupation. The chief military representative dissented as this man's usual and ordinary occupation was not in fact one of the certified occupations. The Tribunal granted temporary exemption for fourteen days from 20th December 1916. No further application without leave."

Service in the Royal Garrison Artillery

Ormonde's fate was now effectively sealed. In January 1917 he was obliged by law to enlist. He joined the Royal Garrison Artillery as a Gunner in the 144th Siege Battery, which was serving in France at Mesnil, under the command of Captain Lewis Dowrish

Joll. The siege batteries were deployed several miles behind the lines, armed with the "big guns" capable of destroying not only enemy artillery, but also supply routes, railways and stores.

The 144th battery was armed with BL 6-inch 26-cwt Heavy Howitzer guns. The 6 inches referred to the diameter of the barrel, and 26-cwt (about 1300 kg) to the weight of the barrel and breech together. Despite its weight it was the lightest of the heavy howitzers, but still a terrifying prospect for anyone unlucky enough to be on the receiving end. Each shell weighed 100 pounds. It was able to fire its shells at a steep angle in a high trajectory, allowing them to plunge to earth, seemingly almost straight down, on targets up to 11,400 yards away. It was a weapon of enormous destructive power, particularly adept at destroying underground bunkers and strongpoints. The 144th battery would have been made up of six guns, each requiring a detachment of ten men to fire it. These guns were capable of "indirect fire", i.e. could target invisible targets such as those over a hill.

Early in the war accuracy was facilitated by a "forward artillery observer", but later a more sophisticated system of hitting a target on the map using geometry and mathematics was developed. In addition, aircraft became capable of transmitting target coordinates by means of morse code. At the beginning of the war a siege battery would have used horses to move the guns and ammunition, but by 1916 the 144th Siege Battery was mostly using four-wheel-drive 3-ton lorries to tow the guns and carry the shells.

It might be supposed that the RGA gunners were relatively safe, being so far behind the lines, but there were a number of risks, and they were vulnerable to enemy artillery fire. The guns themselves were temperamental beasts, liable to misfire if not handled correctly. Great skill and precision was required from every member of a gun team to prevent accidental injury or even death to their own gunners. There would be a great sense of teamwork in an effective artillery unit.



6 inch 26 cwt Howitzer, Royal Artillery Museum, London (Wikimedia commons)

The 144th Siege Battery came under the control of the 56th Brigade RGA, a battalion sized unit commanded by a Lt.-Colonel, in August 1916. Confusingly, this is sometimes referred to as the 56th Heavy Artillery Group. Unfortunately, there are no war diaries available for the 56th Brigade between March 1917 and March 1918 inclusive, so Ormonde's early service is a mystery. What is clear from the April 1918 diary, however, is that Ormonde's battery was completely overrun by the Germans at the start of the Spring Offensive in March 1918.

German Spring Offensive 1918

Being deployed so far behind the lines, gunners of the RGA were not in possession of any small arms, except the revolvers of the officers. This left them particularly vulnerable if suddenly swamped by storm troopers, for they had no way of defending themselves. Ormonde's unit would not have had time to move the howitzers to safety, and would have been forced to just smash the breech mechanisms and flee for their lives.

On 3rd April 1918, the Commanding Officer and Adjutant of 56th Brigade RGA were searching for any surviving men from the 144th and 106th Siege Batteries. The trail led them to Bussy-les-Poix, 15 miles west of Amiens, where a collecting area had been set up for the stray members of artillery units lost during the British retirement. Both units had been taken under the wing of the 66th Brigade RGA during their flight, and were in a sorry state. According to the war diary they had quite literally lost all their equipment: *"On re-joining brigade 106 SB were in possession of a screw driver and 144 SB the stand of a director. The men of the batteries were practically without clothes, blankets or kit of any description."* A director was a type of theodolite for setting the elevation and angle of a gun. It's rather touching that someone had bothered to keep possession of the stand throughout the retreat. The diary doesn't say how many men were left. They were found billets at La Fresnoye, but the unfortunate Padre with them was left behind.

The writer of the diary wrote that *"the Padre C.A.W. Wilkinson was dumped at Poix the Colonel explaining that he had no room for him during the moves."* One hopes that the Padre was eventually welcomed back to the fold, but it would appear that he didn't have a warm relationship with the Colonel.

Over the next two weeks the 144th SB was re-armed, and provided with lorries and stores. An outbreak of mumps probably made the process more difficult than it already was. By dawn on 25rd April 1918 they were in position at a point near Coigneux, 17 miles SE of Arras, and were ready to go back into action. The night had been spent under trench covers and tents. They spent the next 17 days harassing positions on the new German frontline, mostly during the hours of darkness.

On two occasions they fired gas shells into a valley where it was believed that German forces were concealed. They then moved slightly north to a "silent position" close to Bienvillers-au-Bois for two weeks. I assume that this means they were out of action and in reserve. When they became an active battery again, on 1st June 1918 they engaged a hostile German battery using airplane observation, once again from a position near Coigneux. The hostile battery was "silenced" after 204 rounds had been fired. There is no report in the war diary of any casualties in the 144th SB. June and July 1918 were spent in the same area, with the battery being in action nearly every day.

The Advance to Victory

At the beginning of August 1918 the 144th went into reserve at Hurtebise Farm near Famechon. The Battle of Amiens, which proved to be a great Allied victory and the turning point of the war, was about to start. In consequence, Ormonde and his comrades were under orders to move at 2 hours' notice by day and at 1 hours' notice at night. As it turned out, his unit was not required to go into action, and instead went into training for ten days.

The Germans were now retiring towards the Hindenberg Line. There is suddenly an air of excitement in the usually dour war diary which reports on 21st August 1918: *"British IVth Corps attacked on a 10,000 yards front from Moyenville to Puissieux at 4.55 this morning. We cooperated as follows: SB 144 fired 40 rounds from 4 - 4.30 am on an enemy HQ. From 7.05 am to 7.29 am fired 65 rounds on Achiet-Le-Petit. 8 am moved forward to K 12 A 9.2 near Rossignol Wood ... First reports to hand say we have taken*

Ablainville and Bucquey and Puissieux and that the tanks are in Achet-Le-Grand. The ground mist did not lift until this morning until 11 o'clock. The news is good and the mood of the troops excellent (N.B. it is still only five months since March 21st)."

The weather was very clear and exceptionally hot, creating a lot of dust on the roads. The next day, 22nd August 1918, the 56th Brigade RGA moved its HQ forward to the old British trench system east of Fouqueuvillers. The Germans in the area were reported to be *"retiring hastily on Bapaume"*. The 56th HAG moved again at 22.20 am to a position between Puisieux and Bucquoy. They were in action at 4.00 am the following morning, with 22 wounded reported.

The diary entry for 24th August makes interesting reading:

"Today the entire Brigade's mobility has been put to the test. The Boche has retired to the outskirts of Bapaume and the whole Brigade has moved up in consequence. 144 ordered to move to L 16 C 0 3 between Puissieux and Achet-Le-Petit and were in action at 4 a.m. This is a feat worthy of notice as the state of the roads and the difficulties of the country rendered moving very difficult and the resourcefulness and energy with which the move was done reflects great credit on all concerned. Since the beginning of the attack the weather has been remarkably fine but there has been a serious water shortage in consequence. The situation however is now well in hand. During this period the Brigade has been affiliated to several different Divisions including the 5th, 63rd and New Zealand Division."

The men of 144SB were clearly being stretched to their limits, but the prospect of victory was giving them the motivation to carry out their orders brilliantly. Over the next few days the New Zealand Division started the gradual encirclement of Bapaume. A heavy storm dispersed some of the dust, allowing the 144SB to fire up to 2,000 6-inch rounds a day from their howitzers. On 26th August the diary reported: *"Great news is coming through from the south and everyone is very pleased with life in general."*

On the 5th September Brigade HQ was moved up to an old Factory close to Bapaume. One officer was wounded and three were killed, but no details are supplied. The 144SB continued to advance, covering the forward movement of the infantry in conjunction with field artillery. On 9th September three men were killed in action and buried in a cemetery near Bertincourt, about six miles east of Bapaume.

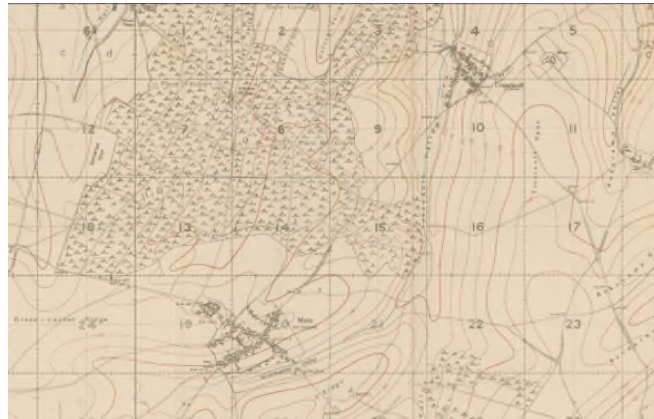
Ormonde dies of wounds 27th September 1918

The Haslemere War Memorial states that that Ormonde died at Metz. This is initially puzzling, because Metz was a heavily fortified German garrison town that was still held by the Germans on that date. It was eventually taken by the French in November 1918, just before the Armistice. It is obvious that he couldn't have died there.

However, closer examination of the trench maps brings a tiny village called Metz-en-Couture to light. It had suffered from the cruel version of military ping pong that had been the fate of so many villages. It was captured by the Germans early in the war, retaken by the British in April 1917, then lost again during the Spring Offensive in March 1918. Unsurprisingly, it was just a pile of rubble by September 1918. It lies four miles east of Bertincourt, in a valley named "Winchester Valley" by the British, below a spur of land called Trescault Ridge.

On 6th September 1918, Ormonde's Brigade Commander received a report that the village was *"unoccupied and Bosche retiring"*. He went to reconnoitre with another officer and decided that the report was optimistic, although other sources claim that the 1st Otago Regiment from New Zealand captured the village on that day. Between 11th and 14th September Ormonde's unit were active in this area while the infantry drove the Germans out of the valley and off the ridge. Three men from the 144th SB were killed and buried at Bertincourt. Operations then continued from 18th-26th September.

On 27th September, Oromonde died of wounds, his Brigade having been called upon to help the 5th Division in the large offensive by the 3rd Army, later called the Battle of the Canal du Nord, that started that day. Selected strong points around Gouzeaucourt were pounded by the howitzers. It cannot be said with certainty when Ormonde was wounded. No one was reported wounded in the war diary on 27th, but it is consistently sparse on casualty details, so we cannot conclude that there were none that day. He might have been wounded a few days previously, but wherever the truth lies, he finally succumbed to his injuries in or near Metz-en-Couture.



Trench map, sheet 57C.SE showing Metz-en-Couture

Ormonde's body was laid to rest in Grevillers British Cemetery, two miles west of Bapaume. He was 34 years old and unmarried when he died. His brother Charles joined the 138th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1915. He survived the war, despite having been wounded and gassed in France, but never fully recovered his health. He died aged 41 in 1922.



Grevillers British Cemetery. CWGC

Sources

Surrey Military Tribunals 1915-1918, Surrey History Centre, Woking, available online at findmypast.co.uk

Official War Diaries of the 56 Heavy Artillery Group, Royal Garrison Artillery, Apr 1918 – Mar 1919, National Archives, Kew, reference WO 95/392/3

National Library of Scotland, British First World War Trench Maps 1915-1918, Sheet 57C.SE, Q20

Another dip into the Society's archives

Chris Harrison



In the Spring 2022 newsletter I promised to answer the question "If the Society was constituted in 1935, why is the AGM in 2020 the 136th?".

Sadly I have not had sufficient time to delve back in the archives to answer this question properly so readers will have to wait.

However, I thought it might interest readers to know what the Society got up to during the Second World War. Inevitably, because of disruption the answer to this question is 'not very much', hence the brevity of this article. Nonetheless, the few things that were achieved have had an extremely positive impact on the Haslemere we know today.

The Society was led throughout the war by its chairman, Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede, who had become chairman in 1934 and was to continue in that role until the 1960s. It started the war with 255 members, seemingly paying annual subscriptions of about five shillings each. Inevitably, participating membership declined as the war went on, the 1944 reports noting the falling off in membership, with subscriptions only amounting to £33 and including a request for members to invite new members.

This obviously had some impact, and in 1945 subscriptions more than doubled thanks to three new life members, and many members returning from the war and paying up all of their arrears.

1941 was a low point, with the annual general meeting being postponed. However, the society was not idle and the report for 1944, marking 10 years of the Society's existence summarised the achievements in the intervening years, including the war years. Readers may recall from my earlier article, that the Society had been initially formed to support the purchase of 30 acres of the upper part of Tennyson's Lane for which £6000 was raised by public subscription before passing the property on to the National Trust.

This initiative was followed by an anonymous gift of 33 acres at Boarden Door Bottom (does anyone know where that is? It is apparently adjacent to the 30 acres originally acquired), to which the Society added the payment of a sum to the National trust for the upkeep of the land.

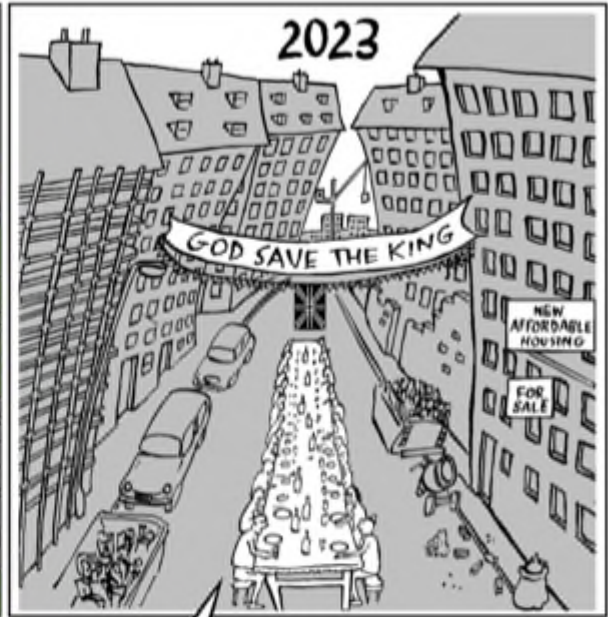
This period of public giving clearly created something of a cascade effect, being followed by the gift of the manorial rights over 500 acres of Black Down by Mr Edward Hunter to the National Trust, followed later that year by 46 acres of Marley Common by one of the Society's members with the promise of a further 15 acres to follow.

Again in 1944, Shottermill Ponds was acquired by two of the Society's members and presented to the National Trust, with the society collecting an endowment for their preservation. Yet another member donated the fields facing the ponds to the Society which in turn transferred the land to the National Trust.

Another major achievement during the war was the establishment of a subcommittee which created a list of 40 buildings in the town centre, worthy of preservation which was presented to Haslemere Council who acknowledged their importance- no doubt a prelude to the later establishment of the conservation area.

This initiative was prompted by the loss of two Elizabethan cottages in the High Street (it is not clear whether these were demolished or simply defaced), something of a parallel to our efforts to create a list of buildings of local merit which was prompted by the destruction of the original house at the Heights school.

Finally, disappointment was expressed that the Society's efforts to have trees planted in Tanner's Lane had resulted in trees being planted off the road rather than along it.



I remember celebrating the Queen's Coronation
over 70 years ago in this very same road in Haslemere.
I can't put my finger on it
- but somehow it seemed a bit different!

Simon MacKie