

THE
HASLEMERE
SOCIETY



**Josiah Wood Whympers
And
Edward Whympers**

**Unveiling of the blue plaque at Town House, High Street,
Haslemere at
3.00pm
Saturday 9 June 2012**

By kind permission of Stephen & Elizabeth Jones



Josiah Wood Whympier



Josiah Wood Whympier
by John & Charles Watkins

Josiah Wood Whympier, wood-engraver and watercolour painter, was born on 24 April 1813 at Stoke Green, Ipswich, the second son of Nathaniel Whimper, a brewer and town councillor in Ipswich, and his wife, Elizabeth Orris. The Whimper family was a well-established aristocratic family in Suffolk.

After 1840 Josiah adopted what he considered the original spelling of his name, Whympier. He was educated at private schools in Ipswich and then apprenticed to a stonemason because he wished to become a sculptor; a near-fatal accident in the mason's yard terminated his apprenticeship before he was sixteen. When his mother died in 1829 he went to London hoping to join a sculptor's studio, but was dissuaded from this profession.

He taught himself to draw and from 1829 studied watercolour painting with W. Collingwood Smith. He and his brother Ebenezzar Whympier set up a wood-engraving business, working in London from premises at 31 Paradise Road.

Unfortunately, despite some early successes, Josiah concluded that his brother lacked a proper focus on the business and in around 1842 he ended the partnership, moving to new premises at 20 Canterbury Place, Lambeth where he also lived.

In 1837 he married Elizabeth Whitworth Claridge (1819–1859). The marriage certificate indicates that he was already a widower at this time but nothing is known of his first wife.

Josiah and Elizabeth settled at 20 Canterbury Place, Lambeth. They had nine sons and two daughters. Josiah intended his sons to continue his business. The sons who followed his plan most successfully were Alfred, who was sent to train with the Edinburgh printer R. Clark in 1857, and Frederick, Charles, and Edward Whympier, who were trained by Josiah as draughts-

men on wood.

Josiah was also master to an impressive succession of apprentices who were to become some of the most prominent draughtsmen of the 'Sixties school': Frederick Walker, Charles Keene, J. W. North, Charles Green, and G. J. Pinwell.

His wood-engraving business became one of the most thriving in London and his engravings appeared in a number of popular books of British Birds and Wild animals. Examples of his engravings for "British Birds and their Haunts (1862)", regarded as amongst his finest are reproduced here. He also engraved for periodicals such as Illustrated London News (1855) and Sunday at Home (1869).



THE BLACKCAP.
CURRUCA ATRICAPILLA.



THE WOOD-WARBLE.

Whympers enjoyed watercolour painting, and exhibited frequently at the New Watercolour Society from 1844, where he was elected associate in 1854 and member in 1857; and also at the Society of British Artists, the Royal Academy, and the Royal Institute of Painters in Oil- Colours.

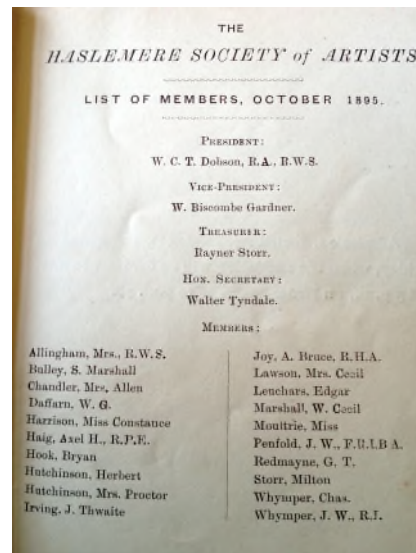
WHYMPER, TOWN HOUSE AND HASLEMERE.

On 1 January 1859 the opening of the railway reduced the journey time from London to Haslemere from at least 4 1/2 hours to under 1 1/2 hours, not too much longer than the journey time today. Whympers was among the first of a group of intellectuals to move to the area, encouraged by the belief that the 'Alpine' air at Hindhead would be good for his wife's health. Sadly she died within weeks of their move to Town House.

In 1866 Whymper married for the third time. His new wife, Emily Hepburn was a talented watercolour painter. Emily exhibited watercolour landscapes at the Royal Academy in 1877–8 and the Royal Institute in 1883–5. She was also a draughtsman illustrator, and illustrated *Beauty in Common Things* (1874).

In 1884 Whymper passed over the running of the Firm to Edward, and Emily died only two years later.

In his retirement it is not too fanciful to assume that he was an active participant in the intellectual hot house that characterised Haslemere and Hindhead at this time. He exhibited for the Haslemere Society of Artists in 1894 and 1895, becoming president in 1898, a post he held until shortly before his death. It is interesting to note the familiar names (including 3 recipients of the society's plaques!) in the list of members for 1895.



Whymper's charming pictures of St Bartholomew's church, taken before Penfold got his hands on it, and reproduced here, are held by the Haslemere Museum.





Whympers died at Town House on 7 April 1903, and is buried in Haslemere churchyard. Collections of his work are held at the British Museum, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

He seems to have enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. The censuses between 1861 and 1901 record a resident cook and a housekeeper and in 1871 there was also a groom and gardener. At his death his estate was valued at £9645 13s 4d, equivalent to £808,000 in today's money or £3,270,000 adjusted for average earnings. Whether this wealth was the fruits of his labours, or augmented by inheritance from his father, we do not know.

Edward Whymper



Born in 1840, Edward was Josiah and Elizabeth's second son. He was educated at Clarendon House School until the age of fourteen, when he was apprenticed as a draughtsman engraver in his father's firm. His diary from 1855 to 1859 records his avid interest in public affairs and his frequent attendance at Baptist chapel and cricket matches at the Oval. After an early desire to go to sea or become an engineer Whymper developed an intense but unfocused ambition: 'I had ideas floating in my head that I should one day turn out some great person, be the great person of my day, perhaps Prime Minister, or at least a millionaire' (Smythe, 50).

Such ambitions, do not at first sight sit too comfortably with a future as an engraver, although happily, it was a commission in 1860 by William Longman to make illustrations of the Alps that initiated his mountaineering, for which he is best known. He undertook an extensive journey in the Central and Western Alps for this commission.

The following year, he completed the ascent of Mont Pelvoux, later reaching the summit of a neighbouring peak, subsequently named the Pointe des Ecrins (which at that time was the highest point in the French Alps) in 1864.

Whymper centred his climbing ambitions on the Matterhorn, and from 1861 to 1865 he made seven attempts from the Italian side, sometimes in partnership with his rivals John Tyndall and Jean-Antoine Carrel, a guide from Val Tournanche. On 14 July 1865 he climbed the Matterhorn from Zermatt by what is now the normal route, the Hörnli ridge, with Lord Francis Douglas, brother and heir presumptive to the marquess of Queensberry, Charles Hudson, vicar of Skillington in Lincolnshire, Douglas Hadow, son of the chairman of the P&O shipping company and a former student of Hudson's, Michel Croz, a Chamonix guide, and two Zermatt guides named Peter Taugwalder, a father and son. On the descent Hadow, an inexperienced

climber, slipped and fell, knocking over Croz and dragging Hudson and Douglas off their feet. Whymper and the Taugwalders braced themselves and the rope tying them to the others broke, plunging the other four climbers 4000 feet to the glacier below.

The disaster provoked a scandal, which included suggestions – passionately denied by the survivors – that a rope was cut to save Whymper and the two other climbers. As the Times put it, the dead were not "common men". An inquest determined that the rope that broke was a spare piece of inferior quality, which had been improperly used. Queen Victoria even suggested to the Prime Minister William Gladstone that the comparatively new sport should be outlawed.



The account of his attempts on the Matterhorn occupies the greater part of Whymper's book, "Scrambles amongst the Alps (1871)", in which the illustrations are engraved by Whymper himself and which to this day remains one of the best ever selling

books on mountaineering.

The accident haunted Whymper:

"Every night, do you understand, I see my comrades of the Matterhorn slipping on their backs, their arms outstretched, one after the other, in perfect order at equal distances—Croz the guide, first, then Hadow, then Hudson, and lastly Douglas. Yes, I shall always see them..."

The accident also permanently embittered him. An 1865 photograph shows

the intense gaze of the powerful and confident climber in a relaxed and res-



olute pose. An oil portrait by Lance Calkin, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1894, again depicts Whymper in his climbing gear, but his crossed arms, receding hairline, furrowed brow, downturned lips, granite jaw, and steely eyes darkened by circles from years of insomnia all suggest the forbidding, taciturn, and often morose demeanour for which he was known in his later years.

However, this accident did not deter him from his exploratory zeal. In 1867, he led the British Exploring Expedition, travelling to Greenland in an unsuccessful attempt to cross the interior with dog sledges. He and botanist, Robert Brown, succeeded in collecting specimens on the shores of Vaigat, which were later deposited in the British Museum. He returned to West Greenland in 1872 when he led the British Reconnaissance Expedition, examining the coasts around Disko Island, making glaciological and geological observations and collecting fossils.

Prevented by political difficulties from climbing in the Himalayas, Whymper next led an expedition to the Ecuadorian Andes, organized primarily to collect data for the study of altitude sickness and the effects on the human body. In 1880, he made the first ascent of Chimborazo, and spent a night on the summit of Cotopaxi, in addition to making first ascents of six other great peaks. The results of his journey were published in 1892 for which he was awarded the Patrons Medal of the Royal Geographical Society. He brought back a large collection of rocks and other natural history specimens and suggested important improvements in the construction of aneroid barometers.

Often considered his magnum opus, *Travels among the Great Andes*

of the Equator (1891–2) combines a popular account of his ascents with his detailed scientific observations. He also published a pamphlet: *How to Use an Aneroid Barometer* (1891) and designed a new tent for his Ecuador journey that was widely used by mountaineers for many years.

Between 1896 and 1897, Whymper compiled two popular guidebooks to Chamonix and Zermatt. He visited the Canadian Rockies, making the first ascents of Mount Whymper (named for him) and Stanley Peak in 1901.

He was a member of the Alpine Club for 50 years and served as its Vice President (1872 – 74). In 1872 the King of Italy conferred on him the order of St Maurice and St Lazarus. In 1892 he received the patron's medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

He was also much in demand as a lecturer; being socially ambitious, he would sometimes ask his nephew to sit in the audience and alert him to dropped aitches—a lifelong habit- by snapping his fingers. He was a skilled photographer and in later life used his own lantern slides to illustrate his lectures.

Meanwhile the engraving business continued as a source of income. Edward contributed illustrations to numerous books of travel, such as Samuel Manning's *Swiss Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil* (1866), and to journals, such as the *Sunday Magazine*, *Leisure Hour*, and the *Illustrated London News*. He also drew many portraits, examples of which appeared in *British Heroes and Worthies* (1871). With his father he contributed many engravings to Joseph Wolf's *Wild Animals* (1873–4). However, in the face of competition from cheap photographic reproductions, the business closed in 1900.

Nevertheless his guidebooks on Chamonix (1896) and Zermatt (1897), both enjoyed considerable commercial success as a result of his skill as a writer and salesman: he travelled literally from hotel to hotel and from bookshop to bookshop through the Alps selling advertising and collecting royalties for the books. From 1896 to 1901 he spent his summers revising his books and

his winters lecturing on the Alps and the Andes.

After the closure of the business he made a lecture tour of the United States and Canada, and from 1901 to 1909 he returned to the Canadian Rockies periodically to promote tourism on behalf of the Canadian Pacific Railway. With his guides he made ascents and identified walking trails near the route of the railway in the Rockies. In 1905, however, he was injured in a train crash in Canada after which he began to experience memory loss, failing eyesight, and fainting spells.

Connections with Haslemere.

We know little of how much time Whympers actually spent in Haslemere. When the family arrived, he was already 19 and working in his father's firm. The 1861 census records him as living in the house and we know that the only house he ever owned was at 82 Waldegrave Road, Teddington where he moved in 1907 at the age of 67, shortly after his late, only and disastrous marriage to Edith Levin (A blue plaque was unveiled at the house last year to mark the centenary of his death). Given his bachelor existence and extensive travels, it is reasonable to assume that, at least in his younger years when not travelling, he spent a good deal of his time in Haslemere.

By nature, he was a solitary man, but he enjoyed a close relationship with the philanthropist and traveller Charlotte Hanbury that ended when she died in 1900, the same year that the business closed.

However, we do know that he rented a house in Southend after this and in fact Edith was the daughter of his landlady. She was 45 years younger than him, and it was perhaps ominous when he gave her an ice axe as a wedding gift! They had one daughter, Ethel, who also became a climber, but they separated shortly before his death; hardly surprising, given his ailing health. He later accused her of being a gold digger, but whether he excluded her from his will is unclear. Quite what he expected given the age gap, one can only imagine!

Howard Spencer, the English Heritage historian who has researched his life describes Whymper as: "A solitary man, he was more at home among the inhospitable peaks of the Alps than in the company of others, and the Matterhorn tragedy only exacerbated his tendency to morose introspection."

He died on 16 September 1911 on a visit to Chamonix in France. Fittingly, he was buried in the churchyard of the English church in Chamonix four days later.

In 1925 a bronze plaque with a likeness of Whymper was unveiled on the façade of the Monte Rosa Hotel in Zermatt.





England, United Kingdom

Gobden Ln

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