

THE COCKPIT

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHISLEHURST SOCIETY
Registered Charity No. 298413

FOUNDED 1934 REGISTERED WITH THE CIVIC TRUST

The Cockpit, on Chislehurst Common, has been the traditional meeting place for Chislehurst people on all great occasions from time immemorial

No. 65

Published by The Chislehurst Society

December 1994

Meet the Conservators

Well over one hundred people attended a meeting with the Commons Conservators on Wednesday 5th October at the Methodist church hall. The event was jointly arranged by the Conservators and your Society's local studies group.

Chislehurst people are all aware that the Commons are far more than mere open spaces. They are something of which local people are justly proud and which they are prepared to fight to preserve. This was demonstrated very clearly to Lord Camden in 1785, when he wished to enclose more of the Common, and again a century later when the action of local people finally resulted in the Acts of Parliament that secured the Commons for public use and established the Board of Conservators to manage them.

At the inaugural meeting of the Chislehurst Society's local studies group it became clear from questions that the Commons were still a matter of great concern to many people, and that the work of the Conservators was by no means fully understood or appreciated. It therefore seemed a good idea to arrange a meeting to enable the Conservators to meet the public. The Conservators are local people and to qualify as Conservators some of them have to be "frontagers", living beside or on the Common. They are very much "our" Conservators, trying to do as good a job as they can with a very limited budget.

The meeting was arranged in two parts. First, the Conservators, led by their chairman, Andrew Whittaker, gave short talks about various aspects of their work. Secondly, the meeting was open for general discussion and questions.

Andrew Whittaker out-lined the history of the Commons and the Acts of Parliament that resulted in the formation of the Board of Conservators in 1888. Initially the work of the Conservators was funded by money raised by the Vestry but this responsibility passed to the Chislehurst and Sidcup Urban District Council and then to the L. B. Bromley on its inception in 1965. The budget and its allocation is determined by the Council's Leisure Services Committee.

Of the sixteen Conservators, all of whom are unpaid volunteers, fifteen are elected by the Council and serve for periods of three years, and one is appointed for an unspecified term by the Lord of the Manor. The chairman of the board is elected annually by the members of the board. The current chairman is, co-incidentally, the appointee of the Lord of the Manor. This was a useful reminder that

Chislehurst still has a Lord of the Manor, Lady Jenny Rankin, who is descended from the Marsham-Townshend family. She does not live locally.

The board is divided into four sub-committees covering staff, finance and equipment, environment, verges and publicity. Their headquarters are in the Old Fire Station in Hawkwood Lane.

Two full-time Keepers are appointed to attend to the day-to-day work, which includes litter control. Some work, such as large scale mowing or tree surgery, is contracted out. Budgetary restraints limit what can be done.

The management plan

A five year management plan for the Commons will assure the future for the Conservators. A management plan was adopted in 1986, but the Great Storm of 1987 jeopardised it. The new plan of 1993/94 has built on experience gained since then. There is no suggestion that Bromley Council will take over their tasks; indeed this would be impossible without another Act of Parliament. However, valuable help and expert advice are available from members of Leisure Services staff, particularly Sue Swales and Colin Buttery, who advise the Board on conservation and woodland management.

Mr Buttery, the next speaker, is parks and conservation manager. He talked about the three main aims relating to the Commons. These are: their recreational use; wild life; and landscape considerations. There are many paths and roads crossing the Commons and these have to be kept clear with due regard to wildlife and landscaping.

In earlier times the Commons were true heathland, largely devoid of trees. Grazing animals, wild and domesticated, exerted natural control over tree seedlings, but as Chislehurst developed the animal population declined, and trees began to grow. The Commons now represent a young woodland, and control by thinning, mowing and other methods has become necessary in order to allow the growth of native trees and natural undergrowth.

Conservation in action

Much can be done to improve rides and paths by mowing their verges so as to encourage low-growing wild plants, and to keep encroaching shrubs and overhanging trees at bay. The line of paths can be made more winding, to add variety and avoid a corridor or tunnel effect. Traditional methods of woodland management, such as coppicing, are also being used. The total effect is to create broader, lighter

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and drier paths where wild flowers can flourish and thus increase attendant insect and bird populations, and to generally improve the appearance of woodland areas. Those who were concerned about what might appear to be vandalism were recommended to observe how quickly cut trees grew back, and how ground plants and wild life in general thrived from the greater levels of light. The same effect could be seen as one result of the Great Storm of 1987, but the Conservators could exert much greater and more careful control than any storm!

This same need for controlled human intervention was expressed by the next speaker, Alice Sennett, who talked about the heather patches on the south side of St Pauls Cray Common. She reminded us that the Commons were nearly all heathland up to about 100 years ago. Heather, once plentiful, is now reduced considerably by tree encroachment, and regular weeding to eliminate tree seedlings is essential to preserve these patches.

Preservation of grassland by careful mowing policies was the theme of Pat Howley's contribution. Mowing has to be done in recreational areas, such as that used by the May Queen event and the Summer Fair, but is otherwise mostly limited to ensuring that road sight-lines are kept clear. Mowing in sequence is vital to ensure that wild flowers and various grasses are allowed to grow and set seed. Some grassy areas need weeding to ensure the survival of more delicate grasses. This encourages wildlife such as ants, lizards, grasshoppers and butterflies.

Pond Preservation

The ponds formed the theme of Colin Knight's talk. In Chislehurst the ponds are formed in old gravel workings; Prickend Pond is by far the largest of these and represents centuries of gravel digging. The free-draining Blackheath pebble beds, from which Chislehurst derives its name, provided gravel for road-making and other purposes and sand of good quality. Much digging took place in the 1870's and 1880's, probably a reflection of the growth of local housing at that time. This gave rise to the unsightly appearance of the Commons, which in turn led to their ultimate preservation. The rights of the Lord of the Manor to dig gravel, sand, turf and peat ceased in 1894.

Many ponds have dried up or have been filled in. Websters Pond in Ashfield Lane, near Kemnal Road, was cited as one example. One notable pond is the Overflow Pond, by Bromley Road, created by the parish in 1795. This is at a high point on the Common, and only when the water level in the gravel builds up in very wet periods does this pond fill up. For various reasons to do with improvements to local drainage in the High Street, this happens less often now. The area around this pond is important for its wetland vegetation. Boggy areas also occur by Rush Pond and Prickend Pond. These areas may appear to be muddy and useless but they are of ecological significance and it was for such reasons that an area around Rush pond was fenced off for a time, to allow the natural vegetation to re-establish itself. The natural tendency is for ponds to fill up with leaves, silt, grasses and plants, until they cease to be ponds. To preserve their amenity value ponds have to be dredged periodically. Previous dredgings have given us the islands in both main ponds. When Prickend Pond was dredged in 1988 the silt was spread around the banks and now supports a wide variety of grasses and plants.

General maintenance of the ponds includes shoring up the banks and removing rubbish. It was admitted that Canada Geese are becoming a problem with their messes, but they are also an attractive wild life feature, together with other water birds, which all form part of the ecosystem.

Wombles and weeders needed!

The final word was left to Hugh Lindley-Jones, former chairman of the Conservators. He said that there were now only two Keepers instead of four, and they spent 20% of their time clearing litter. He called for volunteers to spend a little of their time helping with this task, which was particularly needed in the Royal Parade, Village Green and Prickend Pond areas. Heather patches needed weeding, a task that might appeal to nature conservancy enthusiasts. Anyone willing to help should telephone 081-467 1886 – a significant number, being the date of the first Local Commons Act.

Question Time

Questions raised included the problem of dog-fouling. The answer lies with responsible dog ownership and to assist this the Council offer their free Poop-a-Scoop scheme. Bags will soon be available from Chislehurst Library.

Nesting boxes on the Common were suggested as a means of encouraging more birds, but it was pointed out that there is no need to increase variety or numbers; this is dependent upon adequate food supplies. Thus it is better to improve habitat management to encourage birds.

Horse riders straying off designated bridle paths present a hazard; the Conservators are in regular correspondence with all local riding schools.

The question of traffic speed on Commons roads was raised, though this is a problem everywhere. Bruce Hurn, chairman of your Society, said that a Council traffic calming working party has been formed. In connection with this, it was pointed out that Commons roads cannot be widened; the Act of Parliament stipulates a width of 40 feet.

In conclusion, John Sennett pointed out that the idea of widening roads is by no means new; a law of 1285 stipulated that on all main roads in the country the brushwood should be cut back for 200 feet on each side – no doubt to decrease cover for robbers!

Bruce Hurn gave a vote of thanks to all concerned with organising the meeting, which was generally agreed to have been a success.

Further reading:

The management plan for the Commons is available at Bromley Central Library local studies section. A copy will become available at Chislehurst Library.

Chapter 14 of Webb's *History of Chislehurst* gives a useful history of the Commons; and the pamphlet on Chislehurst Commons, produced by the Conservators, is still available from their office, and from the Library.

Roy Hopper

(Roy Hopper is chairman of the Society's local studies group)

Archaeology at Scadbury

In 1986 the Orpington and District Archaeological Society (ODAS), with the cooperation of the London Borough of Bromley, began a long term archaeological investigation of the site within Scadbury Park. The moated area encloses an island about 51m by 37m on which are brick foundations of a manor house complex which was demolished in the 18th century. The ancient foundations are capped by modern brickwork, laid in 1930 with the intention of conservation. The surrounding moat is about 2m deep and from 7m to 17m wide. Its water supply issues from a spring line along the junction of the Woolwich Clays with the Blackheath Pebbly Sand. Access to the island was formerly by a west-

ern drawbridge but is now by a northern causeway of uncertain age. These remains stand in 300 acres of meadows and woods, the remnant of the lands of the manors of Scadbury and Chislehurst.

Following a complete survey of the site by O.D.A.S., excavation began on large sample areas together with clearing and recording the standing remains. The aims of the programme are to investigate the obscure history of the settlement and to trace its development into the final Manor House complex. This work has been hampered by the well-meant activities of Hugh Marsham Townshend in the 1930's who consolidated the ancient brickwork, carried out some excavations and re-erected an imported hall on to the site. Unfortunately, he left no record of his work which involved removal of many archaeological deposits.

A Summary of Excavations

On its western edge the island platform is faced with a substantial brick wall with internal buttresses. It currently stands some 3.5m above the level of the moat bed. The area alongside this was excavated with a view to establishing the period of construction and the method used. Removal of the various soil deposits in the bays and around the buttresses revealed much infill material. The upper layers contained amounts of tudor brick and tile fragments, oyster and other shell types and bones. Below this the deposits contained charcoal, much bone and shell, pottery and a 1cm diameter lead token of c 1425-1490. The excavation established how the wall and buttresses were built and on the evidence of the excavated materials dated them to, probably, around the middle part of the 15th century.

In the centre of the island and adjoining the site of the hall, on its eastern side, is a large cellar whose brick walls, stairway, and cement floor are all modern, but largely built on crumbling ancient work. Excavations have been carried out around the cellar to investigate the original brick-based buildings and any other traces of occupation. As a result of this work the suggested interpretation is that the cellar would naturally have been below a building of two, or possibly three, storeys. The brickwork mass on its southern side possibly formed the base of a staircase tower, as stairways are shown there on a Marsham-Townshend plan. The cellar probably had a barrel roof turned in brick because slight traces of this remain. A nearly intact barrel-roof undercroft lies nearby. The period of construction is unknown, as very little undisturbed pottery was found associated with the brickwork. However, the nature of the bricks and mortar and the style of the bricklaying would be quite compatible with that of the moat wall construction.

Excavations were made in the adjoining areas south of the cellar and west of the kitchen. A thin pebbly layer remained in the north-easterly part of the area. Under this a U-sectional ditch was revealed that runs downhill eastwards from the hall. The ditch fill was of shelly clay, charcoal, shell and 340 potsherds. The pottery consisted of mainly large sherds of coarse shelly greyware cooking pots and London-type ware glazed jugs. An early 13th century date could be given to this group. The size of the ditch would be compatible with use as a drainage ditch to remove rainwater from the hall area. However, the ditch must have been in use before the creation of a hardened levelled surface over the island; it therefore predates an established moated manor settlement. Hence, this ditch suggests that there was an earlier hall here, which it served.

Other smaller excavations have been carried out together with a thorough examination of the ancient brickwork on the island, the walled garden and ancient parts of existing farm buildings and walls. In addition the post-analysis of all artifacts found so far has been accomplished.

A more detailed account of Scadbury Moated Manor archaeological excavations may be obtained from O.D.A.S. c/o Mike Meekums, 27 Eynsford Close, Petts Wood, BR5 1DP. The price per copy is 75p payable to ODAS. Interesting information is also given in E.A. Webb, G.W. Miller & J. Beckwith — *History of Chislehurst*, and T.A. Bushell *Imperial Chislehurst*. **Barrie Bull**

Edwardian Chislehurst

The eminence of Chislehurst as a desirable place in which to live coincided with the pinnacle of British power at the centre of her vast empire. It was to span less than 50 years from the late nineteenth century until the onset of the Great War in 1914. When the South Eastern and Chatham Railway cut through the Elmstead Woods tunnel in 1865, Chislehurst was opened up for development. Until then it was described as "having a number of elegant villas with gardens and plantations, being in the most part inhabited by persons of fortune and distinction".

Sir John Lubbock, later created Lord Avebury, who introduced us to Bank Holidays, gave his name to the first road where serious building began.

As the population grew, not only in Old Chislehurst but also in Prickend (West Chislehurst) and Lower Camden, the village witnessed a burst of ecclesiastical building. The Wesleyan Church was opened for worship in 1869, the Church of the Annunciation in 1870, Christ Church in 1872 and St Johns (Mill Place) in 1886. Rich and poor adhered to the discipline of the Church and attendance in "Sunday Best" was obligatory with most families of all classes. In keeping with social legislation which was beginning to be introduced nationally much good work was done by local worthies to alleviate pressure on the under-privileged and to provide treats for the poorer children: trips to the coast, tea parties, sports and firework shows.

The year of 1902 saw the introduction of the Education Act providing free secondary education for all. The National Schools of St Nicholas and the Annunciation widened the scope of subjects being taught. School scholarship places were made available for the new County Schools in Bromley for boys and girls.

Neither was the social side of life neglected. The Village Hall, built in 1867, was the hub of local activities. There was a thriving dramatic society which was beginning to produce more daring plays of the time by George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde. St Mary Hall, opposite the Annunciation Church and built in 1877, was also well appointed for entertainment and meetings. Lectures, lantern slide shows, snooker and dances were some of the functions held there.

There were also many outdoor activities on the commons. Fairs were held on Bank Holidays with donkey rides, stalls and coconut shies. There were annual sports on Church Row and Foxbury, flower shows and pageants were held in the Rectory Meadow (now Walnut Tree Close). Chislehurst also had a brass band which performed in public, usually strategically placed by the Queens Head for later refreshment.

In 1890 William Willett acquired the Camden park Estate with a view to building a park of large exclusive houses for the professional elite and successful entrepreneurs. Unfortunately for him some dispute arose over access across common land which could not be resolved and he sold the land which included Camden Park Road, Wilderness Road and the present golf course with its famous club house Camden Place. The style of Willett houses already erected in this area were easily recognis-

able; gracious design, warm red brick, hung tiles and many windows to introduce the light. In these grand houses around Chislehurst, at some time, lived several Lord Mayors of London, bankers, shipowners, bishops, Lloyds underwriters, explorers, paper mill owners, business millionaires, a variety too numerous to list.

In 1900 Queen Victoria was still clinging stubbornly to the throne, soon to be succeeded by Edward VII. The people took pride in her, not only as the matriarch of Europe but as a symbol of the triumphal zenith of the era to which she gave her name. After her death the vital progressive part of the nation heaved a sigh of relief and forged ahead. Chislehurst shared in this change.

Much of this vigour was reflected in the development of Chislehurst during this period. The railway station which was originally situated closer to the foot of the Old Hill was moved to its present site. The sheer size of the buildings reflected the wealth of Chislehurst and its importance. Coastal express trains were halted specially at Chislehurst if an important visitor or inhabitant wished to alight. He or she was met by the Station Master resplendent in silk topper, striped trousers and tails. There were still many elegant carriages awaiting the arrival of the trains but the new automobiles were beginning to appear. Most of London's 8,000 hansom cabbies wore toppers when Edward VII came to the throne in 1901. Motor cars were then a subject for jest but when the King died in 1910 the lingering hansoms were a subject for pity.

Chislehurst West was growing during this boom and many artisans were needed for this vigorous expansion. Painters, plumbers, bricklayers, carpenters, gardeners and domestic servants of all kinds were in great demand to service these new homes. Despite this increased demand for labour, poverty abounded in some areas notably Mill Place and over White Horse Hill where the brickfield had closed towards the end of the 1890's.

An attractive Working Men's Club (now Easdens) was built in Bull Lane financed by Mr Henry Tiarks and Mr Sturge, two public spirited wealthy men, together with Canon Dawson. In addition to billiards the Club boasted a well kept bowling green and a shooting gallery.

Shops and services sprang up everywhere. On Royal Parade at the turn of the century there were two butchers, two fresh fish and poulterers, two greengrocers, two dairies, one grocer, one barber, three sweet shops and tobacconists, two builders, a saddler, upholsterer, baker, two draper and haberdashers, ironmonger, chemist, a book shop and Post Office. Bearing in mind our present inflated costs, contemporary prices seem unbelievable. Pure wool vests 2/9½, finest Paris kid gloves 9/4d, ivory handled silk umbrellas 5/11, nightdresses 2/11, Turkey carpet £5, Japanese pure silk 1/11 per yard and seal jackets £8 15s, lobsters 3/6, sprats 1d per lb, rump steak 1/- per lb, sirloin 9½ per lb. These are but a few examples of prices 100 years ago. It is interesting to note from old photographs the placards outside Mr Coolings newsagent shop proclaims "Trouble in Ireland".

London was forging ahead. Horse drawn buses thronged the streets together with the motorised transport, causing massive traffic jams. At the turn of the century the 2d Tube was opened in London and buses began to run through Chislehurst. There was great consternation here when a Sunday bus timetable was suggested.

Forty thousand Suffragettes agitated in a demonstration from Westminster to the Albert Hall, but it was the advent of the Great War which enabled the women in Chislehurst to become VAD nurses, work in factories, run the buses, deliver the milk and Royal Mail, which necessitated the

driving of vehicles. My aunt donned my father's breeches, jacket and cap and drove the horse-drawn van to deliver the bread. The Belgian wounded who were billeted in many of the big houses in Chislehurst were entertained, given tea and taken for walks and drives by the local ladies.

The Edwardian period is sometimes called the "Golden Age". Chislehurst, together with the rest of Britain, was basking in the late afternoon sun which gave her world a soft illuminating glow, soon to be clouded with fear and despair created by the Great War.

"The lights are going out all over Europe" was the famous remark made by Lord Grey, Foreign Secretary in 1914. When Europe lit up again it was to illuminate the automobile, wireless, the Charleston, Hollywood, universal suffrage, suburban development and Socialism. Four empires had toppled and communism had arrived. The old order in Chislehurst would never be seen again.

R. Chapman

Parents—Children—Students! Alun and Joy Jones Awards for Environmental Studies 1995

Once again, entries for these awards maybe submitted individually and personally by children and young people who live in Chislehurst and attend schools *either in Chislehurst or elsewhere*. This applies also to Foundation Students at a college.

Parents and students may obtain full details of the awards by sending an SAE to :-

The Chislehurst Society (Environmental Awards), PO Box 82, Chislehurst BR7 5TT

This arrangement does not in any way affect submissions which are made through Chislehurst schools or the college, rather, it offers an opportunity for the individual enthusiast to submit a personal study of some aspect of Chislehurst. Last year this was most successful.

Bruce Hurn

Petts Wood and Hawkwood N.T.

Many residents will know that our National Trust Warden, Tony Hall, has been off sick for over six months with a bad back. Inevitably this resulted in the woods, and particularly the footpaths, becoming more overgrown than would normally be the case. Madeleine Hall has been able to do a limited amount of path clearance, concentrating on the main through tracks. In response to requests from wood users additional help from the Trust's regional headquarters at Scotney was arranged and nearly all the regularly used paths are now open. Certain area of the woods were not cleared deliberately to prevent disturbance to late nesting birds.

Several walkers have commented on the apparent vandalism of the Willett Memorial sundial whose gnomon has been missing for some time. In fact, Tony has removed the old gnomon in order to construct a new one which will be in place for the celebrations in 1995 of the centenary of the National Trust and 70 years of the Summer Time Act.

The newly reconstituted National Trust Petts Wood and Hawkwood Committee is here to help you. If you have any concern about the property do contact the Secretary, Diane Saunders, 67 Broomhill Road, Orpington, BR6 0EN (telephone 0689 834689).

David Calver