

THE COCKPIT

A Publication of the Chislehurst Society (Founded 1934)

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

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EDITORIAL NOTES

"At last - another Cockpit!". Grumbles about the infrequency of this publication are sometimes heard, and they are justified. Ideally, it should appear regularly and more frequently; but what is the Editor to do if he has few contributions to put in it? No Editor wants to end up writing virtually every word of the publication. A variety of articles by different "voices" is what is required. Writing doesn't come easily to all of us, and we often find it much easier to talk about our memories or ideas. The essence of success in writing is to write just as if we were talking to a friend; express your own ideas, opinions, say what you think, convey what you know. Don't be shy about spelling, grammar, punctuation or phrasing; it is the Editor's job to sort it out, knock it into shape, and yet still retain the individual "voice" of the writer. The articles in this edition of "Cockpit" have all been generated in this way. With more contributions from the membership of the Society, it might be possible to produce "Cockpit" every four months; many similar organisations manage to do so on a monthly basis.

There is some very promising material available at present; letters from a Chislehurst resident to her daughter in Canada during the period 1939 to the end of 1941 are under consideration; they could well be published as a book in their own right, but an article about them might be published in a future edition. The Editor is corresponding with an elderly ex-resident of Chislehurst who now lives in Suffolk, who has vivid memories of her childhood here in the 1920's. If you have memories you would like to share, some knowledge relating to local affairs that are now history, ideas, opinions, points of view and so forth, try to write them down, and send them to the Editor, Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library, Red Hill, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 6DA. Give him something to work with, and let us see if together we can produce two more editions of "Cockpit" within the next eight months.

Graffiti

Members will be aware of this nuisance. Large-scale outbreaks can be dealt with by Bromley Council; telephone the Civic Centre on 0181 464 3333 to initiate an enquiry. Experience indicates that if any resident feels able to deal with small-scale graffiti, the Council would encourage this approach.

SUMMER SUPPER AND SOCIAL

This will take place at Chislehurst Golf Club House, Camden Place, on Friday 9th July, from 7.00pm. A buffet supper will be provided, and the bar will be open. During the evening, Michael Cooling will entertain us with his popular talk, "Grandfather's Chislehurst".

Tickets, excluding the cost of drinks, are priced at £12 per head, and are obtainable from Sue Thorogood - 467 2411, Brenda Calver - 467 2510 and Nicolette Comport - 467 5726. This is a splendid opportunity to see something of one of Chislehurst's foremost historic houses, so make a note on your diary for Friday, 9th July, at 7.00pm!

A MILITARY VEHICLE ASSESSMENT CENTRE IN CHISLEHURST IN THE 1940s

We have received an enquiry from a writer and historian in Ifield, West Sussex, about a Military Vehicle Assessment Centre and distribution depot in this general area, in 1947.

He has been told that the Distribution Centre was at Kidbrooke, on the site of an airfield, (There was an RAF Kidbrooke).

The Assessment Centre was believed to have been based in a large country house off Lubbock Road. The name "Walsingham" has some relevance. The house seems to have been a 19th century building.

If there was such a place or Centre in Chislehurst, was it used by the Army, the Ministry of Supply, or some other Government Department?

An immediate reply has been sent, indicating the possibilities of large houses in Lubbock Road and Camden Park Road being used for a variety of war-related purposes, and that there is a large house named "Walsingham" in Manor Park. It also seemed worth mentioning the Chislehurst & Sidcup Council Depot in Beaverwood Road, and the proximity there of Western Motor Works as a plausible base for vehicle assessment. Further details were promised ...

If any reader can help to shed light upon this particular enquiry, would they please write to the Editor of Cockpit, Roy Hopper, care of Chislehurst Library. Indeed, any knowledge of the various uses to which properties in Chislehurst were put during the War, would be of considerable interest, and personal memories of such places would be of particular value.

WEBB'S "HISTORY OF CHISLEHURST"

A very pleasant launch party for the book was held at the Library on 10th December 1998, at which Susan Adams, wife of the former Rector, and a great grand-daughter of E A Webb, was presented with a copy. Copies were also presented to Miss Pat and Miss June Bushell, to whose father, Thomas Bushell, the new edition was dedicated; and to Clive Birch, the publisher, in recognition of the hard work he did to make the book such a success. All orders for the Centenary Edition have now been met. The possibilities of using profits from sales, to produce some extra copies, are being investigated. Any further enquiries should be addressed to Roy Hopper, c/o Chislehurst Library, or by telephone to 0181 302 2842.

BUTTERFLIES OF CHISLEHURST

When I returned to live in Chislehurst in 1981, butterflies were plentiful. Since then I have kept a daily record of all the species seen on my walks over Chislehurst Common, Hawkwood and Scadbury. Over the years there has been a serious decline in the number of specimens seen, but not so far in the number of species. However, the surviving numbers of some species is so small that they may eventually be lost to our area.

There are some sixty species of butterflies in this country, but some of them are so rare or local in their habitat that they are unlikely to be seen by the amateur. Over the years I have listed twenty-six species, about half of the national total; but in the last

five or six years the rate of decline has accelerated. Various causes have been suggested, principally the vast quantities of agricultural chemicals now used, to which can be added the rapidly increasing use of herbicides and insecticides in private gardens, and almost certainly climatic changes. Decline is not restricted to Europe; it is worldwide.

The first butterflies to appear in spring are those that have successfully hibernated, and occasionally specimens may be seen on a sunny day in February, although March is the usual time. Among these are the Brimstone, easily recognised by its bright lemon colour, and the highly coloured Peacock, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell and an occasional Red Admiral. These are also the last to be seen in autumn. I have seen a Red Admiral in ivy flowers in mid-October.

Alongside the depressing record of decline there has been one success story. When I lived in Chislehurst between 1946 and 1963 I never saw a Speckled Wood. Now it is to be seen everywhere from May to September, flitting in the dappled sunlight of woodland paths.

In 1987 a research student at the University of East London organised a project to study the distribution of the Grizzled Skipper butterfly, one of the declining species. I had seen a specimen at Hawkwood in May 1992, and informed him of this. He wrote back to me that this was almost certainly the site nearest to Central London so far recorded. I reported this to Butterfly Conservation and during the last two years the Recording Officer of the Kent Branch has been able to confirm that the butterfly still occurs there. This has also been confirmed by the local National Trust Warden.

I have just received a copy of the new edition of Webb's History of Chislehurst, and in the Natural History section (Chapter XV, p 302 onwards) there is a list of the butterflies then recorded in Chislehurst. Thirty-three species are listed. This compares with the twenty-six listed by me, and those not included in my list are as follows:

Clouded Yellow, Pale Clouded Yellow, Pearlbordered Fritillary, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Large Tortoiseshell, White Admiral, Large Heath and Large Copper

The first two are butterflies native to southern Europe and North Africa, but they can frequently be seen in this country during hot summer weather following

migration. I am quite sure that they do frequently reach Chislehurst, but I have not had the good fortune to record them. Then come the three Fritillaries. The Pearlbordered used to be seen in many woodland areas until quite recently but is now an endangered species, due to changes in forestry practices. The Dark Green Fritillary usually flies in downland areas and the nearest place where I have seen it is Shoreham in Kent. The Large Tortoiseshell used to be widespread until the beginning of this century, but is now probably extinct in this country. The record of the White Admiral is quite interesting. It was once widespread until some fifty years ago, but then rapidly declined. It is a woodland butterfly, and last year was found in a wood at Orpington; so that there is a good chance that it may reach Chislehurst again. The Large Heath seems unlikely - it is a butterfly of the northern moors. The Large Copper is a fenland butterfly but became extinct in the 1840s. It has recently been reintroduced into the Cambridge Fens from Dutch stock.

Some years ago I prepared a small pamphlet listing the butterflies to be seen in the Chislehurst district. Since then I have recorded one more species, the Purple Hairstreak. If anyone would like a copy of this pamphlet please send an SAE, A5 size to me at: Flat 3, 4 Bromley Lane, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 6LF

H J Belsey

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF CHISLEHURST LIFE - 1940 TO 1950

I can remember the war years from 1940 to 1942 or '43, when I attended the Annunciation Infants School, which was mixed, and stood alongside St Mary Hall on the current Sainsbury site.

We had a lovely old lady, Miss Merle, as our headmistress, and with her able deputy, Miss Garrett, they used to look after us in every way, and taught handcrafts using raffia and plasticine.

Sadly, a bomb dropped on the school and killed Miss Garrett, but fortunately no children were there at the time. St Mary Hall survived, and was used for various functions for some time afterwards. Chislehurst at that time, although stricken by war, continued to survive and trade as a community.

I can well remember my mother on shopping trips around the village, before and after rationing, calling at Dick Harland's Westhurst Dairy Stores for groceries, where everything was weighed, and the bacon sliced on the machine to your needs. Then

onward to Battle's Bakery for freshly baked bread and a courteous reception from Mr Arthur Battle, who would always raise his hat to the ladies.

Next, the greengrocers, Pearce's, which was situated where Lunns Travel recently stood. Mrs Pearce, the owner, was a very large woman who always had a smile for you, and a kind word for the children.

Other businesses in the village at the time were:

White and Bushell	an Aladdins Cave of hardware
Coolings Stationers	very obliging polite service, and toys in the side window
Bowman's Bakery	Battle's rivals
Cullens	quality grocers
Wheatley's Cycles	BSA with Sturmey-Archer gears
Coxes Electric	household electrics
Co-op South Suburban	ceiling wire cash system
Wrattens	mens' wear
Poxen	butchers
Bulleys	builders
Lamberts	drapers
Stanley	furniture
Dixons	newsagent
Martins Bank	where Abbey National is now
Express Dairy	next to White & Bushell
Mascot Cafe	next to the Queen's Head

I was in the Scouts, and there were two troops in Chislehurst; Hawkwood Troop run by Mr Eggleston ("Eggie"), and Invicta Troop, run by Bill Lash ("Flum"). Bill Lash also ran Lash's Forge, where Barclays Bank now stands, and we used to peep through the large wooden doors when passing, to witness a mass of what we called "The Lights of Hell", as all manner of forging and welding was going on inside.

Chislehurst Mineral Waters in Park Road was a thriving business, and as children we would return empty bottles and get a penny for them. Some were dug up from the ponds, and cleaned out by resourceful children.

From 1943 to 1949 I attended St Nicholas School on the Common, which was then all boys. The Headmaster was David Jenkins who came from Pendine in Wales, and the wooden sign with that name is still on the front of what was his residence, next to the school. Uniforms were black and yellow, and we spent our free time leap-frogging posts, and playing football in what was known as the Pit (the playing field here was

an old gravel pit: Ed). Our lessons were intermittent during 1943 to 1945 due to air raids, and a lot of schooling continued in the shelter just behind the school.

The Chislehurst Cinema, known affectionately as "The Bughutch", was the centre of entertainment during and after the war years. Mr and Mrs Cripps, an elderly couple, ran it. It had noisy curtains, usherettes who discussed their love life behind the back row, and low-budget Johnny Mack Brown westerns. Under-age children would ask adults to take them in.

The Clinic on Red Hill would provide free orange juice for children in oblong corked bottles.

Mr Cox, the Commons Keeper, dressed in a brown uniform and jodhpurs, would chase off schoolboys who climbed trees. The May Day ceremony would take place again on the Common after the war. Ice skating on Prickend Pond was very popular around Christmas time - I fell in one year!

During the war years we had an ARP post on Red Hill, barrage balloons in the fields where Coldharbour estate is now, with cows grazing among the balloons, a British Restaurant next to the Library, a rest centre near the Library, and a siren on top of the Police Station.

In my road we experienced incendiaries, a land-mine, and a V2 rocket, which left huge craters that filled with water. Those of us who were not evacuated played street games called "Cannon" and "Outs", and were whisked off to Chislehurst Caves at night. We had "ITMA" on the radio to make us laugh.

After the war we had a very good football team in Chislehurst Athletic, and my father and I used to support them on Saturdays, and mainly Sunday mornings. The crowd was two to three rows deep behind the rope barrier, and a typical team was:

	Vic Golds	
Fred Boyling		Reg Harland
Eric Harland	Frank Steadman	George Raven
Stan Raven		P Boyles
Dennis Studley	G Valins	G McNally

Although still maintaining a lot of its rural character, thanks to the Common and other open lands, Chislehurst was much more of a close community in

earlier days, due, I suppose to a smaller population and the common bonding of people during the war.

John Mansell

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor has received the following letter from a Mr John Tomlinson, who is at Cambridge University:

"Dear Mr Hopper

I am a history student at Cambridge and I'm currently staying with friends in Chislehurst. I have been looking at back copies of "Cockpit" and I must congratulate you on producing a publication that is both well-researched and in-depth, whilst also being very readable.

In my "year out" before going up to Cambridge, I spent some months with a family in America on a debating scholarship. I believe that you would be interested to learn that the town I was based in was Chislehurst, but in the state of Texas, not the leafy Kentish suburb.

When I visited the library there I found a considerable "Local Studies" section, and within this section I discovered the reason for the name of this town. It seems that a great train robbery had been planned some ten to fifteen years before the railway station at Chislehurst, Texas had been built. Indeed, the site at which the robbery derailment had occurred coincided almost exactly with where the station was built. It is probable that the owners of the railway wanted to build a station somewhere in the area; the derailment site was clearly vulnerable to attack, so it became the first choice for the station.

In the event the robbers were only partially successful. Instead of the firearms they had been hoping for, they made off with twenty-two crates of iron tools. The first newspaper to carry the story reported it under the headline "CHISEL HEIST". By a process of corruption over the years the town became known as variously Chiselherst, Chisleherst, Chiselhurst or Chislehurst. The later maps of the area almost exclusively used the last of these.

Keep up the good work, and I look forward to further issues".

--John Tomlinson

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