

THE PETWORTH SOCIETY
Magazine

No. 173. September 2018



THE PETWORTH SOCIETY
magazine

No. 173, September 2018



Little owl, *Athene noctua*, near Petworth, July 2018. Introduced to the UK in the 1880s including '...a rather considerable introduction at East Grinstead in 1900 and 1901 which probably had some effect.' (Witherby, *The Handbook of British Birds* vol 2, 1943). It certainly did and this diminutive owl is now widespread but has recently declined. Photograph by Andrew Thompson.

FRONT COVER

'Two minutes' silence'. A photograph taken by George Garland in the 1930s.
See 'In remembrance: Michaelmas 1942' on page 6 and 'The Eleventh Hour in a Sussex lane' on page 45.

BACK COVER

The blacksmith-made lower hinge on the hunt gate reproduced on page 32.

THE PETWORTH SOCIETY

CONSTITUTION AND OFFICERS

The Petworth Society was founded in 1974 'to preserve the character and amenities of the town and parish of Petworth including Byworth; to encourage interest in the history of the district and to foster a community spirit'. It is non-political, non-sectarian and non-profit making.

Membership is open to anyone, irrespective of place of residence who is interested in furthering the objects of the society. The annual subscription is £14.00, single or double, one magazine delivered. Postal £18.00, overseas nominal £25.00. Further information may be obtained from any of the following.

CHAIRMAN

Peter Jerrome, MBE, Trowels, Pound Street, Petworth GU28 0DX. Tel: (01798) 342562.

VICE CHAIRMAN

Keith Thompson, 18 Rothermead, Petworth GU28 0EW. Tel: (01798) 342585.

HON TREASURER

Nick Wheeler, Coppards, Middle Street, Petworth GU28 0BE. Tel: (01798) 343777.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Gemma Levett, 18 Greatpin Croft, Fittleworth RH20 1HX. Tel: (01798) 865064.

COMMITTEE

Dona Carver, Lord Egremont, Betty Exall, Carol Finch, Ian Godsmark, Gemma Levett, Miles Costello, Ros Staker, Deborah Stevenson, Patricia Turland, Nick Wheeler and Linda Wort.

MAGAZINE EDITOR

Peter Jerrome

Designed, typeset and produced by Jonathan Newdick and printed in Chichester by SRP Design and Print.

MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTORS

Di Robertson, Linda Wort, Peter Jerrome, Keith Thompson, Anne Simmons, Debby Stevenson, Angela Azis, Betty Exall, Pat Turland, and Annette Swan (Petworth), Chris Vincent (Byworth), Philip Wadey (Sutton and Bignor), Gerald Gresham-Cooke (Tillington and Upperton), Tony Poole (Fittleworth), David Burden (Dunton) and Brenda Earney (Midhurst and Easebourne).

SOCIETY SCRAPBOOK

Debby Stevenson.

SOCIETY TOWN CRIER

Nigel Flynn. Tel: (01798) 343558.

For this magazine on tape please contact the Vice Chairman, Keith Thompson.

Published by The Petworth Society which is registered charity number 268071.

The Petworth Society supports the Leconfield Hall, Petworth Cottage Museum, the Coultershaw Beam Pump and the Friendship Centre.

WEBSITE

www.petworthsociety.co.uk

CONTENTS

The Petworth Society	2
Chairman's notes	4
Miles Costello The dog's grave walk	5
Noah Stansmore In remembrance: Michaelmas 1942	6
Debby Stevenson Crossword	7
Keith Thompson The 44th Annual General Meeting	8
Miles Costello A beautiful May afternoon	10
Miles Costello When we count our heroes	11
Max Egremont 'Hold it up and you'll hear it tick'	12
Miles Costello The Bonfire Prayer	20
The June book sale Of crocodiles and dancing girls	22
Old Petworth traders No. 26 George Steggles	23
Peter Jerrome The Petworth Society 1973 – a reflection	25
Jonathan Newdick Freelance	27
Gerald Webb The spell of the woods (1): driving on acorns	30
Mick Carver The spell of the woods (2): dovecotes and man-killers	33
Jim Taylor and Miles Costello The Iron Room	38
Bridget Connell Frozen ox liver was a speciality	41
Rhoda Leigh The Eleventh Hour in a Sussex lane	45
Shaun Cooper Still tracking Eleanor Boniface	47

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I have taken the opportunity to offer some observations on the Society's relation to the town it serves. I have also taken the unusual step of reprinting a seminal article reflecting an interview with Lord Egremont which appeared in *PSM* 72, just over a quarter of a century and a hundred magazines ago. He and I are the sole founding committee members still serving. Lord Egremont will talk to the Society on 15 October (details on the activities sheet) and this will replace the iconic Petworth House annual dinner. Numbers for the talk are limited – members only, tickets in strict order of application. We would hope to be back at Petworth House for the annual dinner in 2019.

Andy Henderson would have been impatient of anything approaching a formal 'eulogy' but he was at the very heart of the Society for so long that his contribution cannot go unrecorded. Would he be prepared to accept my saying that his sharp wit and genial company are something none of us will ever forget?



Zeke, 1941-3. His mossy headstone on July 22, 2018. Photograph by Ian Godsmark.

The dog's grave walk, July 22

Miles Costello

It is quite some time since we last did this walk, perhaps ten years or more, and it will be new territory for a few of us. Hardly a walk at all but more a Society pilgrimage to pay our respect to a dog whose story many of us had grown up with. Zeke, 1941-3, had been the much loved mascot of a Canadian regiment camped in the woods in preparation for the Normandy landing. Sadly, Zeke never made it to France as he died following an incident with a lorry, and such was the sorrow felt by his comrades that they determined that their dog should be commemorated in death by a modest memorial (opposite).

Parking is simple: off Kingspit Lane and followed by just a short stroll to the Gog Lodges where the once impressive view of Petworth is now obscured by mature trees. However, move slightly to the right and once again the view opens up and much of the town and house can be seen from this vantage point.

The walk from the lodges to the grave is really quite short and certainly not long enough for the seasoned society hiker and so we take an elongated route. Fortunately much of the walk is through shaded woods and the escape from the sun is welcome. Leaving the lodges behind we pass the end of Lovers Lane, much overgrown but still passable. It would take us all the way back to Petworth if we so chose. Instead we walk deeper into the Gog woods, easy to become disorientated up here with no real landmarks to see and only the distant hum of traffic on the lorry route.

We pass close to Monpelier, Brinksole and the old Parish cottages but see none of them through the dense woods. Each path twists and turns and takes us in confusing directions and then suddenly we are at the grave. We could so easily have walked right past it as I am sure many walkers have. The little cairn and headstone have become green with age and almost dissolve into the background, fresh stones collected along our way are added to the pile as so many have done before us. The regimental badge, stolen years ago, has been replaced, however there are no signs of recent visitors and the low wooden fence around the grave has almost returned to nature and the encroaching vegetation threatens to envelop the site completely.

Our small group of pilgrims spend a few minutes in melancholy reflection and then with a sense of having done our duty we eventually turn away and begin the walk back to the cars. I make a mental note to myself that I must not leave it so long before I next return to pay my respects to Zeke.

In remembrance: Michaelmas 1942

Noah Stansmore

I went to Petworth Boys' School and left in 1939. I would lose touch with most of my schoolmates when I joined the Army and, leaving the Royal Military Police in 1948, I served with the West Sussex Constabulary for 31 years. The very day the school was bombed I went down to move the rubble: I was working for the Leconfield Estate as an apprentice electrician. The bomb had blown out the cables at the adjacent Estate laundry. My two brothers had not gone to school that day as it was wet. I knew many of the boys who lost their lives on that day.

Ronnie Penfold, a victim of the school bombing in 1942 looks at a lark's nest in the long grass of an orchard – probably in the Station Road allotments. His companion is a daughter of Mr Mott, the Market Square butcher (now Barrington's). Photograph by George Garland, loaned by Mr A Penfold.

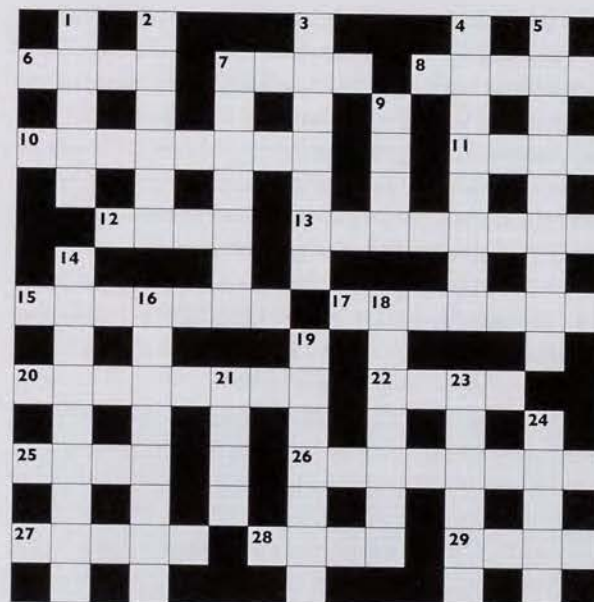


6 Petworth Society Magazine No. 173

WEST SUSSEX CROSSWORD

Compiled by Debby Stevenson

Solution on page 48



ACROSS

- 6** Village in the far west of the county – home to a dissolute chap? (4)
7 Gives the flock an all-over wash (4)
8 Not a welcome visitor at the fish pond (5)
10 Birthplace of reformer Richard Cobden, now known for its bonfire celebrations (8)
11 Architect who designed Market House in Chichester (4)
12 Cow shed (4)
13 Village near Kirdford where Sussex marble was quarried (8)
15 It has a ruined castle and was once home to a museum of

taxidermy (7)

- 17** The best known work by Gustav Holst, (he is buried in Chichester cathedral!) (7)
20 How the night skies look from the top of the downs (8)
22 They once provided pulling power on Sussex farms (4)
25 Queen after whom the lacy flowers of cow parsley were named (4)
26 Forest near Goodwood (8)
27 Could be Itching, Hen or Waters (5)
28 A group of farm animals (4)
29 2 down was named after this marine mammal (4)

DOWN

- 1** Historical divisions of Sussex which run south to north (5)
2 Peninsula where St. Wilfrid landed (6)
3 Inscription on a tombstone (7)
4 Victorian Poet Laureate who lived at Blackdown (8)
5 There is an unusual 3d to children's illustrator Ernest Shepard in this village (9)
7 District presided over by a bishop (7)
9 Funny way to make a protective boundary round parkland! (4)
14 Figure symbolising our nation – inspired by Frances Stuart, (whose portrait hangs in Goodwood House) (9)
16 Towers built along the coast to defend us from French attack (8)
18 A forest near Horsham is named after this saint (7)
19 Played on 25th July at Ebernoe (7)
21 Once an important Sussex industry (4)
23 Join up (6)
24 Some impressive remains from their occupation can be seen around West Sussex (5)

Business, pictures and poetry

The 44th Annual General Meeting of the Petworth Society, Keith Thompson

Amid confusion over the date, time and conflicting engagements, twenty-eight members did manage to attend the AGM on Monday, June 11th.

The report of the trustees and financial statements had been prepared by the retiring treasurer, Sue Slade, to whom the chairman paid tribute. He was very pleased that her various tasks had been taken over by Gemma Levett as membership secretary and Nick Wheeler as honorary treasurer, with valuable assistance from Miles Costello. Celia Lilly was also thanked for dealing with income from book sales and meetings during the changeover.

In answer to a question, Peter Jerrome said that a painting, listed as an asset, was of a view over the Gog by Killick. It is kept at Trowels, Pound Street, his home, in the room where committee meetings are held. All are welcome to call and view. The statements were accepted on a show of hands.

Election of the committee: Gemma Levett and Nick Wheeler had been co-opted since the last annual general meeting. To general approval, Miles Costello was elected at the meeting, while all other members were re-elected en bloc.

Chairman's report: Peter and Keith Thompson had taken on the roles of chairman and vice-chairman in 1978 'until the next annual general meeting' but had remained in office for the following forty years. Lord Egremont had been a constant presence during that period too, keeping in regular contact with the chairman with unfailing interest in the activities of the Society, readily providing access for walks, etc., all greatly valued.

There were changes: arrangements for replacing the annual dinner, which had been held at Petworth House for several years would soon be announced. Fair Day had seen an emphasis on children in the Leconfield Hall, using only the ground floor, partly due to the rental fees (the Society received no income for its input). This had proved popular. Miles Costello had been instrumental in its organisation.

Regular walks and outings continued. Audiences at the regular meetings seemed to prefer 'home-grown' subjects of local historic interest.

The Society had been regarded as rather upmarket at its inception, but now, with the loss of small businesses and increasing traffic, it had to affirm the spirit of Petworth which was in danger of being submerged. Now, Petworth did not seem to want a by-pass, which had been a major issue in the past. The Society had opposed the 'them and us' feeling between the Leconfield Estate and the town, revived the Fair and helped in the establishment of the Cottage Museum. There

was a buoyant atmosphere at the popular Book Sales, which were also essential in raising funds without which it would be impossible to produce the magazine, of which the design and printing had been taken on by Jonathan Newdick.

Slides of some of the year's activities included Fair Day, Bertie Pearce's magic show, visits to Standen and Penshurst Place and walks at Limbo and Stag Park, including Janet Duncton's now famous tea at Osiers.

Business over, Andrew Thompson presented a powerpoint show of pictures of wildlife in the Rother Valley from his book *River*, with relevant poetry beautifully read by James Simpson adding to the atmosphere. The photographs depicted the landscape, home to many birds, including three species of owl, butterflies, damselflies, mink (now decreasing in numbers), harvest mice, flowers and the wonderful Sussex cattle, developed by the 3rd Earl of Egremont.

Gravel riffles have been created in the river to encourage trout spawning, and wetlands are maintained both for cattle grazing and for migrant wildlife. The English partridge is struggling now, but, more encouraging, there has been a recent resurgence of goldfinches, yellow-hammers and linnets. Our grateful thanks to Andrew and James.



A herd of Leconfield Estate pedigree Sussex cattle keeping cool on the banks of the river Rother in high summer. A scene unchanged for centuries. Photograph by Andrew Thompson.

A beautiful May afternoon

Linda and Betty's Pheasant Copse Walk, May 20th. Miles Costello

We turn off the busy main road at Limbo Lodge, opposite Limbo Farm, and through the huge gate into the Pheasant Copse. We have the kind permission of Lord Egremont to park inside, a useful endorsement as normal entrance must be made on foot and parking can be difficult outside. We assemble by the forester's workshop. [See page 30, 'The spell of the woods (1): driving on acorns']. Formerly a military building, it is a lone witness to the area's previous life.

A beautiful May afternoon with barely a cloud in the sky, thankfully no obvious royal wedding hangovers, and a healthy number of walkers plus Bob the dog. The average age of the group considerably reduced thanks to the presence of the charming Milly, Jess and Danny. Straight off into the woods and Linda and Betty, clearly meaning business, stride away, a delightful stroll for the rest of us, the column strung out at times as walkers lost in conversation lag behind the front runners, but no hurry, time stands still in these woods.

Nissen huts and concrete water towers, tank traps and spent ammunition, the detritus of an army preparing for D-Day once filled the copse; all gone, or covered by over-running vegetation. The voices of the young soldiers innocently preparing for battle are no longer heard even on the wind, melancholy thoughts of which our three young travelling companions are blissfully unaware. Back to today and Jan points out the tiny creeping Speedwell spreading out to capture the dappled sunlight that struggles to break through the canopy. Primroses and bluebells, remnants of spring, cling on even as the days get warmer. Huge pylons at first dominate the wood and yet by ignoring them they somehow blend into the background and become almost invisible. Down another ride we pass the old wooden fishermen's 'dunny', unused and dilapidated, it is slowly collapsing into the ground and has thankfully been replaced by modern facilities further on. Ian takes some discerning photographs of the old hut but has no desire to investigate further.

Out of the woods we move from one pond to another all gloriously maintained to serve the valuable fishing community, in one we come across a 'cloud' of tadpoles, possibly a million strong, toads rather than frogs I am told, surely a natural phenomenon to rival any other. A cuckoo announces its presence, the first that I have heard this year, a little late perhaps but nothing to be concerned about. A tiny frog is captured as a digital memory by the ever vigilant Ian. The girls, far ahead are kicking over the severed corpse of a slow worm, a victim no doubt of the mowing machine.

The route of the walk is illogical, known only to Linda. But somehow or other we eventually arrive back at the cars having negotiated the banks of more ponds than you could shake a stick at. The area is clearly an under-used resource on our very doorstep, no excuses for not visiting, as a public footpath runs right through the Pheasant copse and on into Stag Park. Thank you Linda and Betty.

When We Count Our Heroes . . .

Miles Costello

I found the following short note pasted to the inside front cover of the log book of Petworth Boys' School. It is an extract of a letter written to the headmaster of the school by R.P. Burt. The whereabouts of the original is unknown as are the full contents of the letter. The note appears to have been transcribed in the hand of Arthur Hill who took over as head teacher of the temporary school at Culvercroft in Pound Street in the autumn of 1950, some eight years after the bombing which destroyed the North Street Boys' School. It is, however, quite likely that the recipient of the letter was not Arthur Hill, but his predecessor F.P. Mickleburgh, who had originally come to Petworth as head of the evacuee school. The letter reminds us that not only were thirty-one lives lost on Michaelmas Day 1942 but also that several of the children who survived were very badly injured and spent a considerable time in hospital, indeed some of the boys never fully recovered from their injuries and it can hardly be imagined what psychological scars were inflicted upon those lads who purely by chance survived the bombing. The John Streeter referred to by Nurse Burt was one of the most seriously injured survivors. Not quite six years old at the time, he was absent from school that day but in the nearby Laundry Cottage when the bomb struck. John lost most of his eyesight and suffered other terrible injuries, his mother Elsie was also badly wounded and his grandmother Eva Streeter was killed.

'I was the male nurse on duty in the ward at St Richard's Hospital where the victims of the bombing of your school in 1942 were treated. So inspiring was their courage and especially that of John Streeter that I wrote the following verse'

When we count our heroes one by one,
Let's not count them by the deeds they've done,
For greater heroes by far are they
Who suffer in silence.

Hold it up and you'll hear it tick

Lord Egremont in conversation with the editor in June 1993.
Reprinted from PSM 72

My parents lived in London in the late 1940s and I was four when we came to Petworth to live at New Grove in 1951. I have a vivid memory of being brought to Petworth House to see my great-uncle Charles. He was obviously very ill and I suppose that even as a child I sensed he was about to die. He had the ground floor room that we now use as a dining-room converted into a bedroom. There was a nurse in attendance and I distinctly remember being brought in to see my great-uncle. He had an enormous gold watch, or so it appeared to me, and he gave it to me to hold, saying, 'Hold it up and you'll hear it tick.' I held it up and could hear it tick just as he said. He was in his pyjamas, lying in bed. He had a red face and seemed a kindly old man. He spoke very gently to me. It was the only time I saw him for he died soon afterwards.

My parents didn't move into the big house immediately. The title had passed to Lord Leconfield's brother, Hugh Wyndham, a noted antiquarian, who was married but had no children. He too was elderly by now and had already decided that he did not want to come and live at Petworth House. My own grandfather, Edward Wyndham, Lord Leconfield's next oldest brother, also declined. Both brothers gave up their right to inherit, leaving the estate in trust for my own father, John Wyndham, Lord Leconfield's nephew. A lot of work needed to be done at the house; central heating in the private rooms and much else so we stayed on at New Grove for a while.

As a child I could know nothing of such matters but unbeknown to me the Leconfield Estate was passing through a crisis unparalleled in its long history. I don't mean that it was threatened by changing attitudes, Lord Leconfield would have known better than anyone that the old days of implicit obedience and a huge workforce were gone for ever. The Leconfield Estate could live with that. Any large estate will evolve in response to changing patterns of social thought, or fail to do so at its own peril. The problem was at once more straightforward and more directly threatening, one that cut to the Estate's very heart. It was death duties. Lord Leconfield had been a landowner on the grand scale – had it not been said that in the early century one could walk from Petworth to Shoreham and never set foot on non-Leconfield land? The route may have been circuitous but in essence the saying was true. There had been desultory selling before 1952 but never enforced selling in response to a massive capital demand.

Death duties posed the dilemma that the Estate could survive as an entity only

at the cost of being partially dismantled. It is a dilemma that has haunted us ever since 1952. A slight relief was that no duty was payable on the House itself; that had been made over to the National Trust in 1947. For the rest, however, the situation was desperate. A large part of the Sussex and Cumberland estates would need to be sold and the whole of the Yorkshire estates. The price of land was low then which compounded the problem. In addition a number of pictures and much of the good furniture was given to the nation in lieu of duties. It was a watershed. In the face of such a massive financial blood-letting, the Leconfield Estate could never again be the force it had been. Commenting on its later history people so often suggest that my great-uncle would have lamented this or that. 'It wouldn't have happened in Lordie's time, or "The old Lord Leconfield would have a fit if he saw what was going on'. Such comments merely illustrate a misunderstanding of the crisis of 1952 and after. Nothing could ever be the same again. Great-uncle Charles was a realist. He knew that things could never be the same again, he knew that an age had gone. It is not the Leconfield Estate that lives in the past, it is those who look to transplant the situation before 1952 into the utterly changed world of today. It cannot be done. I too wish it were possible but I have to live in the real world. It is no service to my great-uncle to live out a phantasy. The old Leconfield Estate had died with him in 1952.

Hugh Leconfield died in 1963 and my grandfather Edward Wyndham became Lord Leconfield until he too died in 1967. The two brothers' forfeiture of the right to inherit had spared the estate another set of death duties and the title passed to my father John Wyndham. In recognition of his services as private secretary to Harold Macmillan he was created Lord Egremont, technically a new title but effectively also a resuscitation of an older one which had been in abeyance since the death of the third Earl of Egremont in 1837. Yes, he could have called himself Lord Leconfield, as I can. I am Lord Leconfield as well as Lord Egremont. In practice, however, we have tended to use the Egremont title which is, in a way, older than Leconfield, Colonel Wyndham being created Lord Leconfield by Queen Victoria in 1859.

We continued living at New Grove for a year or more after Lord Leconfield died but most afternoons I would come up to the House to play with the marvellous train set that had belonged to Lord Leconfield's adopted children, Peter and Elizabeth. It was probably 1954 before we finally came to Petworth House to live. I had a little room of my own and I liked that. In 1956 I would be sent to boarding school, Heatherdown, near Ascot. It does not exist any more. No, I didn't dislike the idea: I quite looked forward to it, after all I would meet children of my own age. My upbringing was in some ways more subject to what was considered appropriate than most people's. Being heir to somewhere like Petworth House imposes its own restrictions. There are things you can do in my position and things you can't. I would not say you have a greater or lesser freedom of action. It is, if you like, a different kind of freedom.

Before I went to Heatherdown I had a governess, Miss Austin, who lived with her sister in Percy terrace, while 'Nanny' spent a lot of time with me as was normal in a household such as ours. 'Nanny' is over eighty now but remains a family friend whom we are always pleased to welcome back here on holiday. I do not want to give the impression that life before Heatherdown was solitary. It was in no way that. My particular companions at that time were Andrew and Patricia Wales whose father was clerk of the works then, and Michael Robertson, son of the head forester, who went on to appear on children's television. It was at this time in the 1950s, either before I went to Heatherdown or during the holidays that I really got to know Petworth and was out in the town for much of my time. Not only that, but I would ride all over the Estate with Mr Barnes the groom. A real martinet he seemed to me but he certainly taught me to ride. A favourite excursion was to ride out to Stag Park, Chillinghurst and Raghams, while another was up into the Gog woods and into Flexham Park. At first it was just Mr Barnes and I, later my sister, who was four years younger, joined us. It seemed a huge age gap then, less so now of course. I think if you are as I was, 'inducted' into a particular countryside at that age, the consciousness of it never leaves you and you have an awareness of, and sensitivity to, change that you could not acquire in later years.

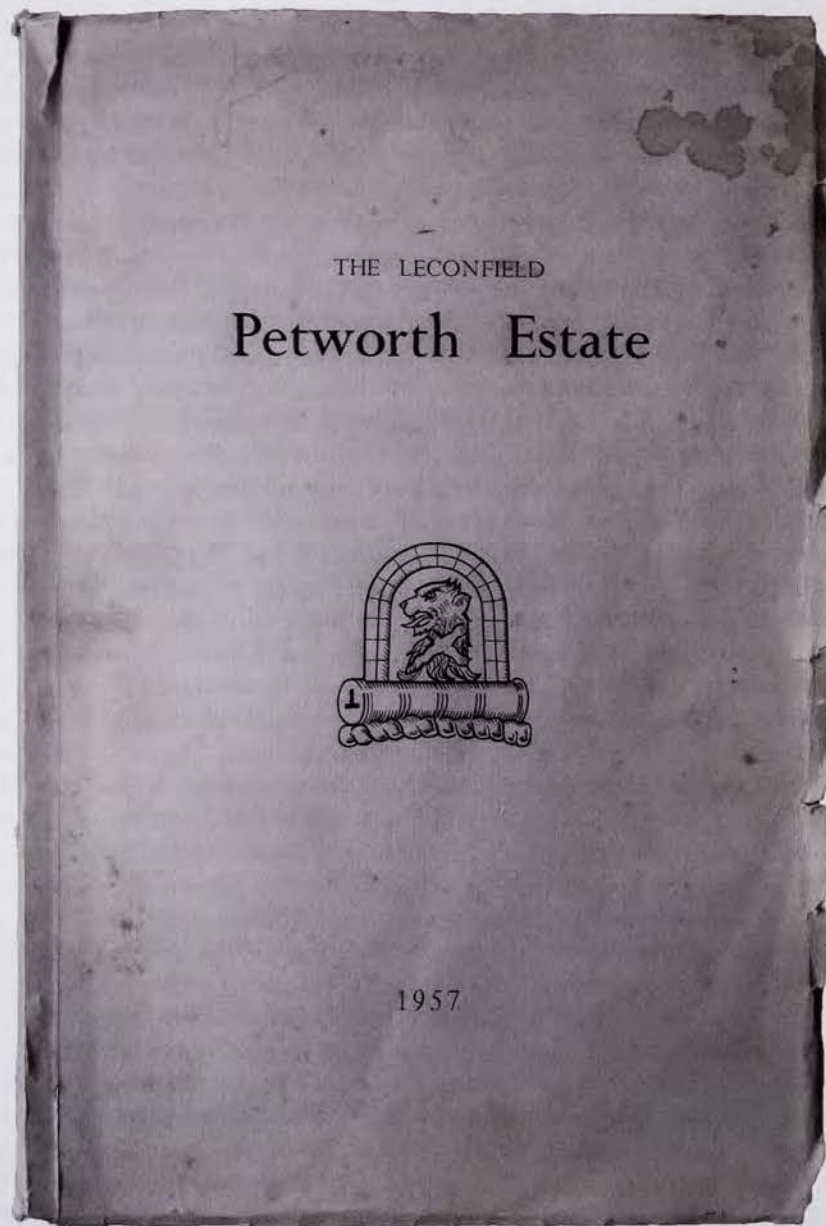
Looking back today on Petworth in the 1950s, what strikes me most is that Petworth has lost the old feeling of being the centre of an agricultural community. It is no doubt a process which had already started between the wars. After all, agriculture is no longer the major employer it once was. The town seemed more crowded in the 1950s, there was a tangible impression of people coming in from the villages and there were lots of little shops to cater for them. So many in Lombard Street for instance. And the tradespeople – Miss Older in Angel Street, Arch Standen the tailor in Market Square; Mr Moss the chemist was still in East Street where Wilson Hill had been. There were the Eager brothers, or, perhaps my favourite tradesman, old Mr Bishop in Lombard Street. When I was very young he called me Max. As I grew a little older he graduated to Mr Max. He always seemed in memory to be standing at the door of his little shop. I suppose he went back into the shop sometimes but I only remember him at the door.

There were buses bringing people in from the villages, people who had a feel of the country about them, more exactly perhaps a feel of the land. There were still characters, but there was a difference from those George Garland had portrayed in his photographs of Petworth life between the wars; such few characters as remained were becoming divorced from their true agricultural roots, on the way to becoming eccentrics rather than genuine characters. Surely I am right in thinking the traffic was worse then – you remember the long lines of traffic Sunday nights stretching right down Pound Street and Station Road, and the Specials at Bacon's Corner and the Pound. At Goodwood time we would stand outside the main

entrance collecting for the Red Cross. Goodwood seemed more of an occasion, less anonymous than it is now. The traffic was horrendous.

The loss of the regular buses has made a difference. Even the half-forgotten bus-stops seem symbolic now, the one by the old Iron Room and the one outside the Leconfield Hall. I know that buses still stop outside the Hall – but only intermittently. It was the regular hourly service that inspired confidence and kept Petworth in close touch with its hinterland. There were more pubs too. Again I think this was connected with people coming into Petworth more than they do now. Almost every Sunday I was at Sunday School, Mr Yorke being the Rector then. There were many more people working in the Estate yard in those days and I was allowed to play about with tools and other bits and pieces. In this period in the 1950s I was as close to Petworth as any child could be and it is a feeling that has never left me. I am never sure whether to be amused or upset at suggestions that I have lived in a kind of cocoon, sheltered from the real Petworth. Who would be so bold as to claim to know the real Petworth? Does anyone? What is the real Petworth?

Eton followed Heatherdown. A predictable enough progress I suppose for someone from my background, just as Heatherdown had been predictable before. I was back, however, every holiday. Petworth, after all, is my home, always will be, always has been. Even when I went to Oxford I still had that awareness of the Petworth in which I had grown up. After Oxford I worked in publishing for a couple of years before my father became seriously ill. He was only 52 when he died in 1972 and I could not reasonably have anticipated succeeding to the title at such an early age. After all, if he were still alive he would only be 73 now and the Wyndhams generally are a long-lived family – look at great-uncle Charles and his brothers. It was the early seventies, I was two years out of Oxford and the Leconfield Estate was facing such a crisis as it had never known in all its long history. Worse even than in 1952. After all, in 1952 we had much more land to sell, perhaps even some that could have been considered expendable. Anything now would cut to the quick. Capital was still depleted after 1952 and my father had simply died too soon to enable provisional planning to take proper effect. The Yorkshire Estates were already gone, and much of the Cumberland. Extensive sales would be needed and the very future of eight hundred years of history was at stake. I could not carry on in London; here was a crisis that demanded my total attention. I needed to be on the spot. I could not handle the situation by being an absentee landlord, nor did I want to. I wanted to see the crisis out, living here with it. Hence the sales; not a cynical operation to raise money but something that the Leconfield Estate had to do to survive in any recognisable form. Contrary to some suggestions Leconfield does not raise capital at the instigation of its agents in order to earn them commission. We sell to pay taxes imposed by the state and I can assure you I keep too close an eye on this to allow any agent to hoodwink



The sales brochure for the 1957 Leconfield Estate sale. The brochure measures 15 x 10 inches, contains 142 pages and lists 170 lots from Elsted in the west to West Chiltington in the east.

me! Taxes have led to this retrenchment – taxes and borrowing money to pay taxes. Do not misunderstand me. I am not complaining about the system. It is right that we should be taxed. This is a democratic society and these taxes are the result of decisions of successive elected governments. Leconfield have never questioned this.

At this time I had no technical training in farming management, Why should I have had? My father was still a young man when he died. I had not been to agricultural college, all that I knew of the Estate, and it was a good deal, had been picked up almost casually over the years. I had a lot to learn, and quickly, but I have always found this stimulating and twenty years on I like to think that I am still learning. I cannot be remote. I have to make day-to-day decisions. I would like to stress this: someone in my position cannot be remote from their estate. The idea of remoteness is a romantic myth. Two hundred years ago perhaps a landowner might be remote from the workings of his estate but even then only at his peril. You need only to read the letters of Charles Seymour, sixth Duke of Somerset, in the eighteenth century to see what an iron grip he kept on his estate, even when he was away at court he knew exactly how many melons were in each glass house. Remoteness is not a tradition at Petworth and in this day and age is a practical impossibility. I read books about agriculture, I talk to people and I try to learn from my mistakes. A golden rule is not to make any decision in haste or under pressure. I am dealing with an entity that has been formed over many centuries. One false decision could dissipate a great part of it. Caution must be a watchword. Take the question of possessions. I sit here talking to you surrounded by the treasures of hundreds of years. They are mine and yet I hold them in trust for future generations. No, I don't find this oppressive but it does give me a heavy responsibility and a recurring dilemma. Should I sell for the sake of the Estate or do I, by selling for the sake of the Estate, diminish that Estate and break the trust that is reposed in me? Which is the greater duty – to use them for the benefit of the Estate or hold them because they are part of that Estate?

We do not employ on the scale we once did. We can't. Labour is very expensive. Petworth and its villages are not dependent on the Leconfield Estate in the way that they once were. But before we lament the passing of the Estate as a significant force in the area, remember that we still run 12,000 acres. What would have happened to this without the Estate? What about the piecemeal developments, the gradual changes in the character of the land, that would have happened if we had sold it all off in little plots and parcels? It is a question I never hear asked. More than this, however, the Estate is all I have. The idea that somehow it doesn't matter to me is ludicrous. It has to matter to me. It is my birthright and my trust for the future. I have a heavy responsibility not only to the future but to the present. Our priorities are to look after our own employees and our pensioners and to see that our tenants are able to farm profitably. They must come first.

We have about 250 tied houses and cottages and since 1972 we have been engaged in constant upgrading. With a reduced workforce there is of course a surplus over requirements for staff. But it's not as easy as some think. Many properties need drastic modernisation to be let or sold. The constant process of renovation is hampered by the equally constant burden of death duties. Remember, death duties have repercussions over long periods. Money raised to pay them can still be a drain on resources many years later. I agree that the process of renovation has been slow. No doubt there have been mistakes in management. No organisation is perfect. But in the circumstances this renovation must be slow. Death duties remain a brake on capital spending. Yes, there are improvement grants, but these are a proportion of outlay. I am always rather bemused by simplistic comments about empty Leconfield Estate housing as if this could solve the town's housing problem at a stroke. If only the problems and their solutions were as simple as the pundits think. The Leconfield Estate is not a statutory authority; it has no obligation to house people who are not or have not been its employees. We are not the District Council. We do help with housing, we always have done but we have no statutory duty to do so. Rents were fixed by fair rent officials of the District Council until this system was done away with a few years ago. Since then we have consistently charged local people less than the full market rent. But we cannot give these houses away. What else would you have us do? Rents are high in this area. If we charge uneconomic rents then other pieces of the Estate will need to be sold to make up the shortfall. Is that for Petworth's ultimate benefit? The Leconfield Estate cannot take on the role of a kind of substitute welfare state. There may have been an element of this in the past but it is not possible now.

What changes have I seen? Well, certainly farming methods have altered; farming is, and has to be more intensive. Leconfield farms cannot opt out of this. Fields are larger and there is a bias toward crops rather than animals. Not just here – look at the downland. I know that technically we no longer hold land on the Downs (our last piece at Upwaltham was sold in 1952) but that does not invalidate my point. Having conceded that we have to move with the times in farming, we are still aware of a continuing stewardship over the land. We have planted thousands of trees in my time. On the home farms, which we cultivate ourselves, we farm commercially but have tried not to change the look of the landscape. The Leconfield attitude to public access is very relaxed as compared with estates in other parts of the country. I do not mind people walking over the Estate as long as they do not leave gates open, start fires, or let their dogs run out of control – access is a reciprocal thing surely. But you cannot keep an estate like this as if it were a garden. We do the best we can but there are an awful lot of fences and gates and we are always going to have restricted resources as regards men on the ground. We employ as many men as the Estate will bear and I always try to avoid redundancies.

I would like to think further about change. Petworth is often dismissed as 'feudal'. But is it? You only have to set the idea down on paper to realise that it is absurd. E. V. Lucas visiting Petworth at the turn of the present century could write that the Leconfield Estate was 'as present in the very air of the streets as is the presage of a thunderstorm' – or that Petworth was 'like Pompeii with Vesuvius emitting glory far above'.¹ If by Vesuvius he means the Lord Leconfield of the time I hope no one thinks of me like that! Any incumbent of Petworth House in the last decade of this century must be aware of drastic social changes and be prepared to act accordingly. Of course I am on all sorts of committees but I do not make a point of attending all of them. How could I? I have a young family and I could easily be out most evenings during the week. But it is more than that. I do not see my role in Petworth as one of making decisions relative to particular local organisations. I am diffident about becoming a public figure in that sense and I think I am right to be so. Local organisations need to regulate their own affairs without 'his Lordship's' views. I will always give advice if asked – but I would rather be asked. I would not want to 'foist' myself on the town.

I am not remote. If people want to see me, I will see them. I have always done this. I am particularly pleased to be a governor of the Herbert Shiner school but I am pleased above all to be in Petworth – Petworth is my life. I have a great commitment to Petworth and I do like to be involved. I am amused to hear that I am 'never in the town'. I can only think that those who say this either do not know me by sight or think that it can't be his lordship because he's wearing scruffy clothes. I can assure them it is!

Relations with the National Trust are excellent. I am delighted to have an old friend from Cumberland, David Sekers, as Regional Director and this year to welcome Dr Diana Owen as administrator at the House. As you know, Norman Thomas, who has worked so hard on town-Trust relations, has retired. I know Diana is extremely keen to continue along these lines. Of course I have a predictable line on the by-pass issue but what I lament most is the feeling of division that the discussion engenders. David Sekers and I feel this very keenly as I know you do.

I hope this interview gives some idea of the range of issues that concern me; as you know, my writing gives me an alternative focus which I am sure provides a certain freshness in dealing with day-to-day Estate matters. It is a great privilege to live at Petworth House. It is good to have such a house so near to, and part of, the town. So many of the great houses are miles out and cut off from their immediate environs. Above all, I hope that my great-uncle would feel that we had, in very difficult circumstances, kept his Estate together as a recognisable entity and that we had kept his memory and his tradition alive as he would have wished.

1. E. V. Lucas, *Highways and Byways in Sussex*, first edition 1904, Macmillan, 1928, pages 96-7.

The Bonfire Prayer

Miles Costello

I wonder if anyone now remembers the last time the Bonfire Prayer was recited at Petworth on Guy Fawkes Night. The tradition of saying the prayer was, in the main, peculiar to Southern England and in particular to Sussex, with various versions being recorded at Littlehampton, Lewes and Lindfield bonfires. A newspaper report from November 1953 records a huge procession of revellers bearing some 1,400 torches marching from Grove Street to Hampers Green to the music of four brass bands. Large crowds lined the streets of Petworth to see the procession and the traditional bonfire prayer was shouted to the crowd by Dick Carver of Wisborough Green to be followed by the lighting of a huge bonfire on the Hampers Common.

The version below hails from Lewes and while I can't agree with its sentiments it was clearly intended to whip up the crowd and no doubt went some way to encourage the disorderly behaviour that was common in the town.

Remember; remember the Fifth of
November
The Gunpowder Treason and plot
I see no reason why Gunpowder
Treason
Should ever be forgot

Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes 'twas his
intent
To blow up the King and the
Parliament
Three score barrels of powder below
Poor old England to overthrow

The following version from Lindfield begins in a rather more refined fashion only to descend into the traditional call for the violence associated with the prayer.

By God's providence he was catch'd
With a dark lantern and burning
match
Holler boys, holler boys, ring bells ring
Holler boys, holler boys, God Save the
King!

A penny loaf to feed the Pope
A farthing o'cheese to choke him
A pint of beer to rinse it down
A faggot of sticks to burn him
Burn him in a tub of tar
Burn him like a blazing star
Burn his body from his head
Then we'll say old Pope is dead

Remember; remember, the Fifth of November
The Gunpowder, Treason and Plot
We know no reason why Gunpowder, Treason should ever be forgot
Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes, 'twas his intent
To blow up King and Parliament
With three score barrels of powder below
Poor old England, to overthrow
By God's providence he was catch'd
With a dark lantern and burning match
Holler boys, holler boys, ring boys ring
Holler boys, holler boys God save the King
What shall we do with him boys?
Shall we hang him? – NO!
Shall we drown him? – NO!
Shall we burn him? – YES!

If anyone remembers the Petworth prayer please get in touch with me, (01798) 343227, or failing that perhaps the current organisers of the Hampers Green bonfire may wish to adopt an existing prayer or cultivate a new one.



Eight of the thirteen Gunpowder Plot conspirators: Thomas Bates, Robert Winter, Christopher and John Wright, Thomas Percy, Guido Fawkes, Robert Catesby and Thomas Winter. A detail from an engraving by Crispijn van de Passe, c.1610, National Portrait Gallery, London. Those not depicted are Sir Everard Digby, John Grant, Robert Keyes, Ambrose Rookwood and Francis Tresham.

Of crocodiles and dancing girls

The June book sale. Peter Jerrome

'Withdrawn' stamped in bold capital letters. The decision is final. Library shelving isn't limitless and sentiment is out of place. A book that has slept undisturbed for years is on its way. *Selections from the Greek Papyri*¹ has served its time. It offers a Greek text with English translation and scholarly notes. Hardly a comfortable mix for the Society book sale.

Papyrus is a reed-like plant growing in some profusion along the Nile. The flattened stems would, in Classical times, be used much as paper is now. Papyrus leaves have been found in tombs, as protecting mummies but, above all, in huge rubbish dumps on the outskirts of ancient Egyptian towns and villages. Once covered with the desert sand, and, if above the damp level of the Nile, papyrus can survive indefinitely in the dry climate. The content is roughly the sort of material that today would fall to the office shredder. It can be fragments from classical authors, private letters, accounts, magical spells, marriage documents, in practice almost anything. Milligan's selection runs chronologically from 311 BCE to the first Christian centuries. Papyri can be dull, repetitive and obscure but what they do offer is the fact that they are not intended for other eyes, ancient or modern and hence present an unguarded view of individuals and their everyday lives two thousand years ago. Here is a mirror image of our own hurrying digital world, simpler perhaps, but peopled with that same fragile humanity.

The philosopher Epicurus writes lovingly to a child, perhaps an orphan. Polycrates asks his father, a leading architect, to use his influence to introduce him to King Ptolemy. A wife writes to her husband, apparently in retreat at the Temple of Serapis, suggesting in fairly robust terms that it is time for him to return. Two girl attendants twins, at the Serapium² use a royal visit to make complaint of poor treatment.

It is 112 BCE and the Roman senator Lucius Memmius is making a visit. He is to receive VIP treatment and to be shown the sacred crocodiles and the labyrinth while the guest chambers are to be prepared. 'Let him be received with the utmost magnificence'. Hilarion writes to his wife Alis in 1 BCE to say that he is detained in Alexandria. 'If you bear a child, let a boy live but if a girl expose it'. A prodigal son writes to his parents for help while other parents issue a public notice that they are not liable for their son's debts. A priest at the Socnopaeus temple is under investigation for letting his hair grow long and wearing woollen garments. The papyrus breaks off at this point. Gemillus castigates his nephew for the careless loss of two pigs and instructs him not to return without bringing a quantity of Lotus (trefoil). The village council

of Bacchias have a festival approaching and write to Aurelius Theon, 'provider of flute girls' to engage two dancing girls for ten days, at the rate of 36 drachmas a day, food supplied and three asses for transport. A deposit is given.

If the book is long superseded by more recent research it offers a window on a world at once familiar and unfamiliar. I think it's found a lodging.

1. George Milligan, Cambridge 1910. A professor at Glasgow University, Milligan would write a popular introduction to Papyri *Here and there among the Papyri*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1923.

2. A temple dedicated to Serapis.

George Steggles

No. 26 in the continuing series of old Petworth traders. Peter Jerrome

George Steggles the chemist would move down from Church Street when the old houses in front of the church were demolished in 1896. He would take the site on the corner of Market Square and New Street now occupied by Lloyds Pharmacy. This invoice from 1892 is for goods supplied to the kennels in Petworth Park.

Writing in the *West Sussex Gazette* in 1968 Arch Newman recalls Mr Steggles in the years before the 1914-18 war: 'The chestnut-moustached chemist, in immaculate morning coat and pinstriped trousers, a buttonhole, fresh from the florists each morning at nine... He was respected by all classes. When members of the gentry paid him a visit, he would carefully place one hand in the small of his back, and the other on his tummy and bow so low one could not see him behind the counter.'



The Petworth Society 1973 – a reflection

Peter Jerrome

Below.

'If the internal combustion engine and the new communications had long eroded the old insularity...'

Petworth Market Square, 15 November 1948.

Photograph by George Garland.



On my taking over as Society chairman in 1978, with Keith Thompson as vice-chairman, the town, at least as I now remember it, had a communal awareness of a formative, sometimes harsh, often imperfectly recalled, past. Inarticulate it may have been, but it would be fertile soil in which a new Society, still uncertain of its role, might flourish.

Petworth in 1978, like any other small town at the time, had its own concerns, its own agendas. Awareness of the Boys' School bombing, if painful still, was at least less searingly immediate. New people had come into the town, while others had moved away or died. The loss of the spire of St. Mary's in 1947 was now as much a symbol as a felt grief. The portents of change were there for all to see. Those old family businesses that had defined Petworth for generations, Olders, Mrs Gordon Knight, Knights the bakers, Weavers, Arnolds, Harpers and the rest were now flickering candles in the cold wind of change. The old loyalties were fading. Petworth people were looking and shopping out of town and the more they did so, the more, of course, they would need to. Petworth was making a painful entry into a brash, abrasive new world for which it had never really been prepared. Cars and lorries had already requisitioned the narrow streets and discussion of a possible by-pass route would evolve into a partisan mix where personality, passion and prejudice jostled uneasily together. If the internal combustion engine and the new communications had long eroded the old insularity, the menacing presence of heavy lorries at once fuelled and gave an edge to the discussion. The old social divisions, of course, remained as permanent, seemingly, as the stones in the Park wall. Might a new Petworth Society, if it certainly could not override then at least sometimes bestride them?

In fact, over the years, the Society has consistently laid claim to a popular support substantially larger than its very considerable membership base. It hosted the triumphant return of the Toronto Scottish Regiment in 1985 and subsequently with its sombre echoes of Michaelmas 1942. Over the years the Society has been effectively the sole guardian of the memory of that day.

Working with Raymond Harris on the restoration of the Leconfield Hall, the Society would guide the fortunes of the Hall, first with the present writer, then with Andy Henderson, for a quarter of a century. With the constant support of Lord and Lady Egremont it would be a moving spirit behind Anne Bradley's pioneering concept of a Cottage Museum. In 1986 the Society revived Petworth's

ancient fair, a nod toward almost a thousand years of history and tradition. If the 'them' and 'us' attitude to the National Trust and the Leconfield Estate now seems something of an anachronism, this owes much to the Society's unrelenting insistence that both are integral to a flourishing and united town. Diana Owen's courage and initiative when administrator for the Trust as the century turned is not to be forgotten. The office of Town Crier was brought back by the Society in face of the studied indifference of the then Parish Council, and the crier kitted out at the Society's sole expense. It is not for nothing that the crier remains the 'Society' crier rather than the town crier. The Book Sale attracts buyers from a considerable distance but is also a forum where internecine town rivalries can be briefly forgotten. The Society scrapbooks, rarely seen in public, begun by Julia Thompson, continued by Pearl Godsmark and currently by Debby Stevenson, are a kaleidoscope of Petworth in the last thirty-five years, while the 173 issues of the present magazine are a vast trove of history and tradition, much of which would otherwise be lost.

Does this matter? Is a brave new Petworth emerging in which the continuity of a remembered past is at best irrelevant and at worst an obstacle to progress? Is the Society immured in a prison of its own making, in thrall to the spirit of George Garland and at odds with a forward-looking town? I cannot say, only wonder if the Society may be the voice of a significant sector of Petworth opinion, certainly not vociferous, nor even particularly articulate, to an extent receptive to new ideas but anxious to see an older Petworth at the heart of a new. I sense a fragility about so much in contemporary Petworth, a nervous flight from continuity, a flight that carries its own insidious threat, the loss of Petworth's distinctiveness as a town, the loss of the uncomfortable, inconvenient, even fractious, conviction that Petworth is not the same as anywhere else and has no wish to be.

The Society's is a voice that after forty-five years is audible still, when others, once more strident, are heard no longer. It is a voice that affirms the spirit of the town to which it owes allegiance and of nowhere else. Its strength lies in its refusal to be the mouthpiece of any particular pressure group. Such a stance has its dangers: the Society can be ignored by those who wish to ignore it; it can seem to stand on the sidelines. It has, however, a confidence born of the long years since 1973, the confidence to look at itself in the mirror of public opinion, give a wry smile, and continue doing what it does to the best of its ability. Its independence is its own particular tribute to the town it has served for nearly half a century.

In the last resort, however, independence is not a strategy in itself, an ideal to be pursued in isolation. What independence can do is to make this magazine, as it has been so often in the past, a forum for discussion, for exploring a way forward. In 2018 it offers, perhaps, space permitting, a unique opportunity.

Freelance

The first in an occasional series of opinions not necessarily shared by the editor. Here Jonathan Newdick writes on the importance of local distinctiveness in building

Every English town is a pocket of English history. Even the likes of Harlow New Town and Milton Keynes. Yet city planners and town councils seem to find it necessary to remind us of this as we drive in past the 30 speed limit sign. 'Welcome to Chichester. Historic Roman town' or something of that sort. More often than not inappropriate flower beds will have been tended around this false welcome.¹ Ideally, of course, you would avoid this theme park approach by coming to town by train for, as John Betjeman wrote in 1943 '... the approach I like to make is by railway, for from the railway line you get an impression of the surrounding country, undisturbed by the adjuncts of a main road',² but that is now frequently not an option. Also, from the train you see the backs of things which often tell you much more than their acceptable faces can.

Petworth is no different. And that seems to me to be a very sad fact. Petworth has, along with so many other towns, become a victim of the Age of Communications and its resultant homogenisation, an age in which town planners, architects and dubious, nameless 'decision makers' are annexing individuality and what used to be called 'local colour' in favour of homogeneity. Even Venice, a city I know well, and probably the only city on the planet which can be truly described as unique, is not immune. It should be remembered that places, all places – cities, towns, villages, hamlets, empty landscape (actually there is no such thing as this last) – are sites not only of artefact but also of process, of what Angela King and Sue Clifford refer to as '... layer upon layer of our continuing history and nature's history intertwined.'³

I was once commissioned to re-design a well-known national magazine and to take account of the views of focus groups. Well, I ignored the focus groups and their views for they were able only to tell me what aspects of the design of other magazines they liked and didn't like. None of them was able to offer any incisive comment about the one title in question and, had I taken note of their views, the resulting design would have been an unhappy combination somewhere between *Cosmopolitan* and the *Economist*.

In some ways running a small town can be a bit like that magazine – you can't just take the easy way out and go to the catalogue to find the same signs as you admired in Winchester. What is appropriate for one place may not be so for another and that easy option will inevitably result in a dreary sameness and loss of identity.

Signs are only a detail, but they are a detail everyone looks at – they are as important as buildings and building materials. Since the 1960s Petworth has suffered from the imposition of what can be described at best as undistinguished domestic architecture. I had hoped that the small development on the site of the old Court House might have begun a trend towards something of which Petworth could be proud but it was not to be. To be fair, this development is not alone: I've seen the same approach in Midhurst; I saw it again on the edge of Doncaster last year. The houses may be comfortable to live in and I'm sure they are energy-efficient, but these need not exclude architectural imagination.

I know the reasons, I've seen the Building Regulations. It is a big document, ten parts, no end of schedules and small print but it must be possible to apply its rules (some of which are of suspect value but which presumably help to keep the manufacturers of uPVC windows and plastic guttering and downpipes in business) to truly contemporary building projects. If we don't, future generations will want to know what we were up to and why were we so timid, so unimaginative. And if they have any sense they'll pull down our attempts at olde worlde nostalgia and do something better.

At the same time planners have to avoid the Poundbury effect. The Prince of Wales' scheme for a suburb of Dorchester is a noble attempt but creating an instant 'traditional' settlement has its pitfalls. It gives the impression of being a film set and, moreover, a film set where Alfred Hitchcock or David Lynch might have felt at home – you are never quite sure what might be around the corner of that very neat and tidy detached garage.

In 2002 I went on a long train journey to see the Weissenhof housing estate which was constructed near Stuttgart in 1927. The architects, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and several others, built twenty-one buildings comprising sixty terraced and detached houses, all different but with a clear unity of design. (Le Corbusier may since have been condemned for his disregard of ordinary citizens' desires and needs but that doesn't negate my argument). Although, unsurprisingly, Weissenhof was at first viewed with scepticism in some quarters it is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and those houses that remain⁴ are much sought after. Now, I am not suggesting that Petworth could afford architects of the calibre of Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe but there is no shortage of young, courageous architects and they should at least be given a chance. Nor, probably, should they do something as radical as at Weissenhof – that estate might be almost a hundred years old but it's very likely still too radical for Petworth.

Town planners and town councils have a responsibility for their town – their individual town – and that responsibility is to move the town forward without destroying its essential and probably inexplicable character. Truly appropriate contemporary and imaginative architecture is one aspect that can satisfy those

needs. It will continue the process of the town by providing desirable artefact which complements and harmonises with the existing medieval, Tudor and Georgian buildings and will, above all, counter the sort of theme park mentality that can so easily prevail. It's not easy but it can be achieved and it doesn't have to be expensive.

1. John Betjeman, *English Cities and Small Towns*, William Collins, 1943.
2. Since writing this I have been told that in Petworth these planting schemes have been implemented to dissuade heavy lorries from entering the town. This would seem to take to extremes the story of David and Goliath but we have to hope that David triumphs again.
3. *Local Distinctiveness: Place, Particularity and Identity – Essays for a conference, September 28, 1993*, edited by Sue Clifford and Angela King, Common Ground, London, 1993. This little book, with its essays by, among others, Gillian Darley, Roger Deakin and Richard Mabey should be in a prominent place on the shelves of every town councillor, town planner and architect in the country.
4. Some of the houses were lost to allied bombing in the second world war.



One of the detached houses on the Weissenhof Estate near Stuttgart which were built in 1927. This one, number ten, was designed by Victor Bourgeois and is one of only a few which was not painted white. While such an architectural style may not be appropriate for Petworth, the sort of thought processes from which it evolved would clearly be desirable.

The spell of the woods (1): driving on acorns

Gerald Webb in conversation with Caroline Egremont and the editor

I was working on a large estate near Salisbury, Longford Castle, and as it happened for the chairman of the Forestry Commission. The head forester was very supportive and keen for me to go further. He suggested I go on an eight-week training course at the Duke of Beaufort's estate in Derbyshire. I came out as top of the intake and was given a six-foot cross-cut saw together with a beautifully made axe awarded for the best student. I think the axe, almost an exhibition piece, was more highly regarded than the saw. I still have it. The saw was, in fact, something of a problem. I had to bring it down on the train with the sharp teeth covered, then perch it on the handle-bars of my bike as I rode home! Felling at Longford Castle was still largely with cross-cut, but much of the work was coppicing, pea and bean sticks in the season.

Forestry in fact had been an enforced change of career: after National Service I had applied to join the police and was already eighteen months into a two-year probation period. Everything was going well and there was talk of a sergeant's course when a motor-cycle accident caused by another motor-cyclist, overtaking on a blind bend, ended a career that had barely started. It also meant I could no longer play football, which I had, to county standard.

I took a forestry trade paper at the time: in fact I'd come to Longford Castle through answering an advertisement in that journal. Clearly it was time, given my new qualifications, to move on. There were two jobs advertised fairly close together in West Sussex, at Petworth and at West Dean. I applied for both. It was, I think, 1964.

At Petworth, Mr Jemmett the head forester, relatively new himself, had an unorthodox attitude to job applications. Instead of my coming to see him, he drove down to the Longford Estate to see me. He left his car outside with the words 'I never interview a person without seeing his house and garden.' Clearly he was satisfied with what he saw, but there had been another strong applicant for the job as foreman.

At Petworth I was interviewed by Mr Shelley, the land agent.

'Now, Mr Webb, Tell me, can you make a gate?' I had to be honest and say I couldn't.

'Can you hang a gate?'

'Yes Sir.'

'Can you repair a gate?'

'Yes Sir.'

Mr Shelley was brusque but he was to the point and said what he meant and after this I was responsible for the repair of all the hunt gates. There were a great many of them – seventeen in Raffing Wood alone. Catches, latches and hatches¹ were part of the job, wet days in the hut at Pheasant Copse. Always oak, of course.

At Longford I had been paid some £20 a week but this included a fair amount of piece-work. The Leconfield offer was a flat £15 but Mr Shelley thought this too generous. I was to replace Jesse Howard, foreman of the northern beat who was retiring, George Elliot remaining in charge of the southern beat. I think Jesse had a word in the office to the effect that if I was to be paid less than £15, I would be unlikely to stay long, so £15 a week it was. On a first look round with Jesse I found a piece of branch on the ride, almost instinctively I picked it up and threw it to the side. No doubt Jesse quietly observed this. The northern beat employed six or seven men, rather the same as George Elliot's southern section.

When I arrived the cross-cut saw was still very much in use, but the era of the chain saw was fast advancing. These were kept in the big hut just inside the Pheasant Copse as you enter from Limbo.² I had Jesse with me when I opened the door and looked in. I saw four chain saws in various states of disrepair. I asked why they were in such a state and was told that the men would pick one, hit a stone, put the saw back in the hut and take another one, and so we ended up with four faulty saws. It was agreed that we should buy four new ones but that each worker should be responsible for his own saw. If anything went wrong he would come to me while each saw would be kept in its own locked box.

I also arranged for portable tarpaulins. I couldn't see the point of trying to sharpen a saw with a wet blade. I also agreed with Ted Jemmett that I would go straight to Haslemere for spares – it would save time. Sharpening the chain saws was now my responsibility, working with an angle-grinder. George Elliot, the southern foreman, was more conservative than I was and went his own way; after all, he had long experience of the woods. Another job was to go to Tilford³ to pick up young trees for planting – in some quantity.

We started in the woods at seven o'clock then and I remember driving the truck with the men ahead of me but out of sight. There was no need to hurry because they could do nothing until I arrived. Mr Shelley saw them and had a word with me to say that he had seen the men ambling along as if they had all day. I was happy to set his mind at rest. I remember it was by the tulip trees planted by Lady Leconfield before the war. Some remain but others have been replaced over the years. On one occasion I was called into the office by Mr Shelley.

'Mr Webb, do you think we should bring piece-work to this estate?'

'Yes Sir.'

'Well, I don't.'



Below and left.

One of the few remaining hunt gates (or 'hatches') on the Leconfield Estate with a detail of its latch and catch – see the opening lines on page 31 and note 1. Made entirely from oak, the gate's principal joints are pegged mortice and tenons while secondary joints are held with clenched iron nails.

As well as the necessity for these gates to be opened with a hunting crop and then to self-close they had to be stock-proof for, as Mick Carver explained: 'All you would have is a hunting gate between farms so only the hunt could pass through. There were no big gates to let a tractor through because one farmer wouldn't allow another on his land.'



And that, for the moment, was the end of the matter.

I recently asked Neil, the present head forester, if he had seen adders in the Pheasant Cope. 'Hardly at all', he replied. But I knew a young larch plantation where the sun shone through the thin canopy on to an open ride where I once counted twenty-two. It was March and they were coming out of hibernation to enjoy the spring sun. Adders are shy; they pick up the vibration of your feet on the ground and to see them you need to go on tiptoe. I always kept quiet about the spot: animals have as much right to be on this earth as we do and adders only attack when they see themselves as threatened. As the larches grew and the canopy allowed less light they would move on.

Tree guards? I never liked them and we would be dealing in thousands. Think of being left with twenty thousand pieces of useless plastic. I preferred to enclose vulnerable plantations in wire netting or sometimes simply accept that a few trees were going to be lost to predators.

The great storm? Well, I suppose you could say that it was part of a forester's work to repair the damage. Strangely, my abiding memory is of playing league darts at the Noah's Ark at Lurgashall. The wind was already high but there was little to suggest what was to come. On the way back the narrow road was completely carpeted with green acorns: it had been an extraordinary year for them. Driving over them was a curious experience that has stuck in my mind. It may be that the wind had battered them one against the other so that they fell and covered the road surface.

If I could work in the woods again I'd happily do so. As the present forester said to me, the woods have a spell that is all their own.

The spell of the woods (2): dovecotes and man-killers

Mick Carver in conversation with Caroline Egremont and the editor

My father had been through the 1914-18 war and considered himself very fortunate to have survived, but unlike some who refused to talk of their experiences, he would often talk of it. He related how he and a friend had been positioned either side of a tree, firing whenever a head appeared in front of them. Rather unwisely, his friend came to Dad's side just as he was firing and the shot grazed his friend's face. Dad volunteered to go out as a stretcher-bearer in no-man's land, unarmed of course. The war left Dad with a suspicion of all things German, a piece of shrapnel in his hand and the Military Medal for bravery. Originally a carter, he had, like so many carters, a natural instinct for horses, reflecting that while they were understandably reluctant to move toward the fighting, they would eagerly gallop back.

The family moved to Chillinghurst in Stag Park before I was born but I never actually lived there, learning of life at Chillinghurst only through family talk. We were a large family, some considerably older than I was, and we were based at Stag Park Farm. Originally there had been a long walk into Northchapel school, but this would be replaced by Mr. Dabb's taxi service, a sideline of his draper's business in Northchapel. I would myself go to Midhurst on the Anstey coach. Ted Chaffer used to shoe the horses at Stag Park then, at the forge which was on the far side of the pond as you come into Stag Park Farmhouse. There was also a carpenter's shop which was joined to it. They were both demolished after they fell into disrepair. Alfred Ayling was the Stag Park carpenter then. He used to mend the carts, wheelbarrows and farm gates. A fine fellow with a big tache [moustache] and glasses. He used to bike there from Hampers Green every day.

As soon as I left school I went to work in the Leconfield Estate woods department. It was 1956. The woods carried a staff of 28 men, evenly divided between north and south and in the overall charge of Stewart Robertson, the head forester. The foreman for our 'north' section was Jesse Howard.

I made an early acquaintance with the dovecote in Stag Park, taking part in the annual cull, the pigeons going to the House. It wasn't entirely random: we tried to weed out the results of interbreeding with wild stock and retain the pure blue rock doves. The dovecote had a door giving entrance for the birds but, a week before, we'd rope up the door, and secure it with a piece of string. We'd then cut the string, open the door when darkness fell and go in with the light of a Tilley lamp. The pigeons would be in nesting boxes. There might be fifty or sixty of which we'd take some twenty, wring their necks or hit them on the head. The dovecote sheltered other birds too – starlings, sparrows and even at one time, an owl. The pigeons weren't fed: they'd take the food put out to feed the ducks on the pond at Stag Park. Pigeons aren't prolific egg-layers, usually laying just two. I don't think the eggs were ever used and if people had once eaten pigeon meat, it was now an acquired taste. The dung? I would imagine it was too potent to be of any use. Pheasants, of course were another matter; my older sister Doris would often pluck pheasants, maggots and all, the more maggots and the smellier the carcass the better, was the attitude, and some would be pretty ripe.

Felling in the early days was largely by axe. The chain saw had hardly come into use, and contractors were brought in to fell really large trees. Much of the job involved what might be classed as routine maintenance: cutting undergrowth and overhanging branches, hedging and ditching, keeping the rides open. We allowed a ten-foot clearance for tractors, five for hunting bridges. Rides had to be trimmed to a height that would allow a member of the hunt to pass without fearing to lose his top hat. Some of them could be burly and Mr Shelley the land agent was not the smallest of men. The hunting gates at this time were rigorously maintained,

and always of oak. They had to be capable of being opened with a riding crop, then to swing back of their own accord. They have been largely replaced now by metal gates although a few of the old oak ones may still survive. Lord Leconfield had been noted for his insistence on their smooth operation. Woe betide if his lordship or Fred Taylor, his groom, had any difficulty. His lordship had been dead five years or more by the time I entered the woods but the tradition to an extent remained. Like the gates, the hunting bridges over the streams were part of the maintenance and north and south both carried a skilled carpenter. Bill Standen who lived up at the Gog then was the carpenter for the north beat and Bill Meachen was carpenter for the south beat. Bill Standen was a brilliant carpenter, a top man – he used to demonstrate how to make gates at the South of England Show.

To keep the rides free of intrusive foliage, we had fag hooks specially adapted by the estate blacksmith. The distinctive crescent had been modified and a long six-foot handle affixed. You cut, of course, with an upward movement. September was the traditional time for ride-trimming and it would continue for two months or so with the hunt particularly in mind. Mr Robertson was a good man to work for and rather less stern than his predecessor Mr Wilcox who had died early in the war. Stern but scrupulously fair, I was told.

Trees to be felled were marked with a draw-knife and different men had distinctive marks. Mr Wilcox had a multiple 'W' which was still remembered, while Jesse had a double 'H' crossed through. Jesse had worked for Mr Wilcox for years and at one time drove him about with a horse and buggy.

The chain saw was to revolutionise the way of working in the woods. The first I remember was some six feet in length with an engine to match. We called it 'the man-killer'. It had to be brought from the estate yard with a tractor and trailer. These were days long before Health and Safety and we had long boots but no protective clothing as such. We would still cut off high branches with a handsaw from a ladder. I think that, in the 1950s, the regular cycle of planting had been disrupted: there was a general switch to planting softwoods like conifers, often unhappy on clay soils. The idea was to seek a relatively quick return, hardwoods being notoriously long in maturing and returning investment.

Mr Robertson left in the early 1960s to be replaced by Ted Jemmett who was, I think, from Wiltshire. I always think of him in terms of the enormous boots he wore. One innovation was piece-work. If we were planting young trees he'd offer a bonus for planting a given number – I could do a thousand a day. Mr Robertson had a nursery just on from New Lodges in the Park and there was another at Low Heath by the Welldiggers pub. The Park nursery was called 'Re-mount', a recollection of the 1914-18 war when the area had been used for preparing horses, requisitioned locally for the Western Front. There is a kind of lodge there, damaged recently, I believe, by fire. In the late 1980s we would write in pencil on the wall



when we had heard the first cuckoo. It would be April. Perhaps the writing is still there. You don't hear the cuckoo so much now. I think people had a greater awareness of nature then. I recognise many bird calls, no doubt because of my years in the woods but I think that for many people nowadays a bird is just a bird.

As I have said, in the early days we'd fell with an axe, and very hard work it was, later of course, we had chain saws. I quickly learned to judge the angle of the fall, there'd be two of us and a glance and a shout would normally be enough. Cordwood was anything up to four feet long and not more than ten inches across. Anything larger was classed as timber. A tractor picked up the cordwood and the timber was usually left for a contractor. Pea and bean sticks were part of a woodman's job, some destined for the gardens at the House. The only time I remember seeing Fred Streeter was once when I delivered logs to him. I also made 'pimps' for the House. There was a definite way of doing it and they were always birch twigs. I remember Peter Wakeford doing it. I might make two hundred a day, bundled in 8 x 25 lots. They weren't just for the House – the Estate heads of department had them too. They had to be tied with tarred string, otherwise mice would gnaw the string and the bundles fell apart. Logs for the House had to be beech: it was traditional. Ash can bring in woodworm and beech burns quietly and doesn't spit.

In 2002 Her Majesty the Queen presented me with a long service medal at the Ardingly Show. The Duke of Edinburgh was standing just behind the Queen. He shook hands with me and said 'I hope that the trees under your care have grown a bit taller than you are!'

1. A hatch in this context is an old name for a gate. According to Revd W.D. Parish in *A Dictionary of the Sussex Dialect*, (1875) 'In names of places [hatch] probably means a gate. It is usually found on the borders of forests, as Coleman's Hatch, Plaw-hatch and Claw-hatch, in Ashdown Forest.'

2. Limbo Lodge is on the Northchapel road two miles north of Petworth.

3. Tilford is south-east of Farnham in Surrey.

Opposite. A photograph taken by Gerald Webb of chestnut staves which would be used for roof repairs at Petworth House. The principal tools for making them were a mallet, here resting in the 'V'-shaped post at the left, and a froe (above).

The Iron Room

Miles Costello and the late Jim Taylor

We are approaching a time when first-hand memories of the Iron Room are becoming ever more distant and will probably vanish altogether over the next twenty or so years. For those who are unaware of the building it stood at the rear of the recently closed NatWest Bank on what had previously been the garden of the Half Moon Inn. The room, effectively a very large 'tin tabernacle', was known initially as the Iron Church and first used on 15 February 1903 while the Parish Church was being renovated. The Revd Herbert Jones writing in the parish magazine of the day describes the building as 'very attractive inside, with its comfortable chairs and its bright lights, and no doubt before we leave it we shall get quite attached to it.' Little could Jones have known then that the Iron Room, as it later became known, would outlast by many decades its original purpose and long before its demolition in the autumn of 1963 it had become a much loved and well-used public building and was, to all intents and purposes, the village hall that Petworth has never had.

The following recollections are edited from notes left by the late Jim Taylor.

For more than half a century the Iron Room played such an important part in the social life of the town that I could not imagine Petworth without it. The old metal building had a uniquely warm and comfortable atmosphere about it which was in stark contrast to the nearby Town Hall which was always cold and draughty.

Visits to The Iron Room were frequent during my childhood and memories of the tea parties that I attended in my early years are of trestle tables and elderly ladies, fairy cakes and sticky buns, usually followed by a finale of conjuring tricks before heading home. I do remember on one occasion having to choose between a visit to the cinema to see 'Life of a Texas Ranger' or the Iron Room and a Chinese magician, I chose the latter though I have no memory of the magic tricks.

Most of the annual Boys' School concerts were held in the Iron Room. I particularly recall a play called 'The Tall, Tall Castle' which had as the main prop a large square box with a crenellated top supposedly to represent battlements; it had been kept in the storeroom at the back of the Boys' School for some time and had probably been used on several occasions. This store was filled with the remains of other plays that had been put on over the years. Our headmaster was a person of great imagination and inspiration, and would encourage us village boys to do things not usually part of the elementary school curriculum. The audition

for the play was held in the Iron Room and the lead part of the Prince was eagerly contested, the test being to trot a hobby horse around the castle. Needless to say most of us boys went round like on a racehorse while Frank Best went slowly at a two-footed trot, a bit effeminate but needless to say he got the role. We suspected that he had been schooled prior to the audition. Fortunately there was not a lot of dialogue in many of our plays. In one I played Maid Marion in 'Robin Hood'. All I had to do was pull a pile of clothing out of a barrel to prove to the Sheriff's men that Robin wasn't hiding there and recite my one and only line 'Clothes, clothes, nothing but clothes', not taxing even for me.

There were other school concerts held in the building though after sixty years memories of them are beginning to fade. I do recall the school band with their distinctive bamboo pipes playing pieces by Handel. Later, after leaving school I would help the local amateur dramatic society with stage props and on one particular occasion the play was 'The Ghost Train' and Arch Newman was as usual in charge of the stage works. I can still hear the end of the play and his redheaded daughter Mary singing 'Beautiful Dreamer' – it would have been 1944 or '45 and Mary was probably about eighteen years old. I still think very highly of Arch as he took the trouble to teach me and others the skills of the building trade when much of the work was still being done by hand. This training took place in a room at the rear of the Iron Room next to the Ebenezer Chapel in Park Road.

The Iron Room was occasionally used by a youth group which normally met in The Club Room in the High Street, the room was ideal for sports and other activities that needed the extra space that the Club Room couldn't provide. Boxing classes were taken by Bob Whitcomb, the landlord of The Wheatsheaf in North Street. His daughter June was a friend of mine and a member of our 'group'.

The war years took their toll on the Iron Room and especially the floor which was badly damaged by the countless army boots which trod it during the regular dances held there. The British and Canadians were particularly heavy with their hobnail boots while the Yanks were more likely to break windows and doors with their fondness for fighting. It was down to Arch Newman, Bill Moss, Gordon Simpson, Fred Hill and myself in the Leconfield carpenters' shop to repair the damage. Thanks to a donation of Columbian Pine from the Canadian government we were able to replace the entire floor. Of course everything had to be done by hand and finished with small wooden finishing planes. Gordon and I suffered sore hands and aching arms for some time after we had finished.

Considering all of the dancing, the heavy boots, the fighting and other antics, the old building stood up well. The dance band were 'The Four Aces' and while us younger lads were not allowed in we would hang around outside listening to the music and hoping that as the night wore on we might pick up a coin or two from the Yanks. Petworth was a very lively town in those war years with soldiers coming

Below.
Undaunted by the rain, crowds gather in Petworth's Market Square for the open-air service to commemorate the coronation of King George V on 22 June 1911. Two windows and the corrugated roof of the Iron Room can be seen in the centre of the picture. Photographer unknown.

On 25 July 1962 the Iron Room would form Lot 20 of 'Parts of the Leconfield Estate', an auction held by Strutt & Parker in the Audit

Room at Petworth House at 2.30 p.m. The sales particulars describe it as 'An Important Corner Site known as The Iron Room comprising The Assembly Rooms and Meeting Hall including part of the old Smithy. About .125 of an Acre. At the junction of Park Road and the Market Place with a total frontage of about 113ft. and a total site area of 5,445 square feet. Adjoining the Westminster Bank and opposite Harwoods Garage. An excellent site for re-development for any of a variety of purposes.'



from miles about to enjoy the facilities. That little corner of the town was very busy, with the old smithy, where we had our woodworking classes, next door was the Ebenezer Chapel and behind it the Art and Craft Room run partly by Arch Newman. Along the west side of the Iron Room was a concrete wall on which we would walk trailing a stick along the corrugated roof and making a noise like a machine gun and of course causing a great annoyance to those inside.

Three public buildings can claim my loyalty in Petworth. First the Iron Room, second the Club Room in the High Street, and thirdly Newlands in Pound Street, the home of the local council and headquarters of the civil defence where, during the war years, many young boys would spend a night or two each week ready to act as messengers should the phone lines be destroyed.

Frozen ox liver was a speciality

Bridget Connell, née Fletcher, in conversation with Miles Costello

Father was born in 1864 and had a long distinguished career as a physician, at Cambridge he excelled at sports and during the Great War he served as a Major with the Royal Army Medical Corps. In 1890 he married Ethel Crossley, a member of the extremely wealthy Crossley carpets family. Together they bought a house at 98 Harley Street where father practiced for many years. Unfortunately Ethel died of cancer in 1918 leaving her husband with five children, three girls and two boys who would later become my half-siblings.

Herbert Morley Fletcher married my mother Mary Willink in 1926, some eight years after he had been widowed, and at thirty five years older than she, they began life at the Harley Street home that he had shared with his first wife. My sister Joanna was born in 1927 and I followed soon after in 1929. I was still a child when my father, who was reaching the end of his career, began thinking of retirement and in 1936 my parents sold their London home, along with a property in Tring, and moved to Petworth where they had purchased a rather rundown but fairly cheap property called Burton Corner. The large house was in an awful state as it had been empty for a number of years and had been largely neglected during that period. Furthermore, we knew nothing of its history other than it appeared to have once been owned by a Mrs Flowers and we only knew that because there were wonderful old servants' bells by the kitchen and one of them was clearly marked 'Mrs Flowers' bedroom'.

Having moved us to Petworth, father was by then fully retired though he was still involved with the King Edward's Hospital fund and would occasionally consult at the Petworth Cottage Hospital. He no longer had an income from his

practice and while we were certainly not poor, by some standards we were not particularly wealthy. We had lovely possessions, lovely furniture and things, but as the saying goes 'that doesn't buy you a joint of meat'. The fact is we were relatively cash poor but yet had to maintain a certain social standing in Petworth. That was just the way it was.

Burton Corner stands just south of Heath End at the junction with the road that leads past Burton Mill and continues on to eventually reach Coates and Fittleworth, I believe that the property is now called Woodberry House and has been divided into apartments. When my parents bought the house it sat in about seven acres of gardens and woodland along with a single cottage – a small country estate. We moved down with a gardener named Percy who was the son of the gardener my parents had employed at Tring. Percy was married and he and his wife moved into the cottage. There was also a lovely Irish lady called Mary who was a second mother to us all and looked after us totally, she cooked and she cleaned and did everything. There were other domestic staff who over the years would come and go though it is Percy and Mary who seemed to figure most in my early life. My sister and I had a governess we shared with two other local girls and that went on until my sister Joanna, who must have been about eleven, went off to boarding school. Meanwhile I began school at North End House in Petworth. My mother would drive me in each day until it became increasingly difficult to get petrol, and from then on I would bicycle there and back, a round trip of about five miles, nothing unusual at the time.

We won't say too much about the school at North End House other than it was brilliant teaching, sadly my time there was not particularly good as it was a rather odd place. The food was so bad that I used to make myself sick rather than eat a meal. I seem to recall that frozen ox liver was a speciality of the cook. I don't think that Mother entirely believed me when I complained about the food until one day she was in the butchers at Petworth, I don't recall which one, when she overheard the butcher say to Mrs Baggaley, the headmistress, that he hadn't any ox liver this week. Fortunately from then on Mother believed me and I was allowed to take a sandwich to eat. Despite the food I must say that we were very well taught. One of the teachers was Mary Powell. She was Irish and I'm not sure how but I think that Mother got her the job at the school. She was the daughter of a Dublin clergyman and each summer we would join up with Mary and her family and have a marvellous holiday in the west of Ireland

I really can't remember any of my contemporaries at North End House. That short period of my life is a bit of a mess and a muddle and it was, after all, war time. There was, however, one occasion that remains etched in my memory. I was cycling home from school when I saw a line of parachutists coming down beyond a row of houses. Of course this was at the time when everyone was on

tenterhooks expecting an imminent invasion. I scurried up North Street as fast as I could and found a policeman and asked him if he had seen them, he hadn't, but then he probably wasn't looking and by this time the parachutes had long since disappeared. When I got home a Police Sergeant came to the house to interview me. He concluded that I had been seeing things, though I was quite sure that I had seen the parachutes, and to this day wonder if perhaps they were English and part of some top-secret operation. I would eventually leave North End House at eleven and went off to join my sister at boarding school at Downe House near Newbury. Each term I would be packed off by train with a huge trunk. Mother would take my elder sister Joanna and myself to Guildford station.

At Burton Corner Joanna and I would spend much of the summer holidays on our bicycles. It is quite extraordinary if you think about it now as the whole of the countryside was awash with hordes of soldiers and vast amounts of military equipment, yet we would often go out in the morning and not return until the evening. We had even been known to cycle down to the coast and to spend the day at the seaside before cycling back home. Although we had a great deal of freedom to more or less please ourselves I recall one summer incident that horrified my parents. A friend and I went out to the corner by the main road and began waving to the Goodwood traffic. Of course we were encouraging the racegoers to throw out their coins and were determined to get our share before the cars reached the official Red Cross collection point at The Benges. This activity was distinctly frowned upon by mother and father. I suppose they almost saw it as begging, which of course it was, but it was great fun and with our proceeds we would rush across to Rapley's Garage at Heath End to buy a Milky Way or some other sweets. The garage was an essential part of our lives. Besides sweets we could get the wireless batteries charged or fetch Father's newspaper and we would be rewarded with a penny from our parents. Such was the importance of Rapley's that my father made a gate out of the garden on to the main road in order to reduce the distance to the garage, the gate is still there today.

Just past Burton Corner and on the opposite side of the road was North Lodge and beside it the gates to Burton Park with the drive down to the main house. At one time the drive came across the road and into the woods, so effectively cutting off the corner at Heath End and emerging on to the Petworth Road beside another lodge. Our property was separated from the drive by a narrow strip of woodland and for some reason or other father decided to purchase it though goodness knows we had enough ground to keep up as it was. Towards the end of the war we had a contingent of black soldiers stationed in the woods next to us, they were marvellous and I would lean on the fence and chat to them for ages, when they left we found lots of tins of dried fruit which we were very grateful for.

In the Courtauld time at Burton Park, Cicely Courtneidge, the famous comedy

actress, would come down to the house and we would be invited to watch her perform, this was of course a great treat for us. Joanna and I had complete freedom of the Park, we learnt to ride our bicycles and in hot weather swam in the Black Pond near to the house, it was really very dirty but that never put us off or harmed us in any way. When the pond froze we would skate on it. Much later a family called Wooley built the farmhouse next to the drive to Burton Park and took over the farm. They were lovely people but they closed off the drive and with it our access to the Park. The farm must have been terribly hard work as the soil was awful and it was almost impossible to grow any decent crop on it.

Yes we regularly attended church at Petworth, but then most people did. An uncle on my mother's side was a Bishop of Rochester, Christopher Maude Chavasse, whose twin brother Noel was one of only three people to be awarded the Victoria Cross twice. We were very churchy and always sat in a pew on the left-hand side by the pulpit. In front of us would sit Colonel and Miss Mayne who lived at Archway House in the High Street. Petworth was very high church, which Mother disapproved of, and the Vicar was Mr Godwin. My sister and I found the whole thing very boring. After church we would occasionally go and have sherry with Dr. Kerr at Culvercroft which we also found rather tedious but you just had to do those things, it was expected of one. That would have been before the war.

Soon after the war Burton Park became a school and Mother became friendly with the headmistress, a Miss Moseley, she kindly gave me permission to use their science laboratory which I took full advantage of. This was after I had left school and before I went up to Oxford. I met a lot of the girls and made some great friends.

The Iron Room at Petworth was the very centre of our lives when we were at home. Anything that was going on there we went to. I think that Petworth missed the Iron Room and never really replaced it with anything. The building, though rather old fashioned, was the heart and soul of Petworth. [See page 38 'The Iron Room'].

Father died in 1950 and Mother decided to sell Burton Corner as the upkeep of the place was financially draining. Selling proved difficult, after all, it was a very large house and the nearby main road had by that time begun to get rather busy and noisy, however it eventually went to auction in 1951 and thankfully it was sold. Fortunately for mother she was very good friends with Mr Shelley the Leconfield agent and with his help we managed to rent Tripp Hill House at Fittleworth for £150 a year and it was from there that my husband and I were married.

The Eleventh Hour in a Sussex lane

Rhoda Leigh

The green bus went more and more slowly. Soon it was crawling along at a mere walking pace. The driver sounded his hooter twice, looking back at the conductor through his little window. His mate consulted a neat wrist watch, then shook his head doubtfully.

'Got the right time on you, Matt?' he asked, addressing an elderly farm labourer who sat near the door puffing contentedly at a filthy clay. Matt drew his enormous turnip¹ from the pocket of his corduroy waistcoat with difficulty.

'Wants five to by me,' he grunted.

'Ah,' commented the other. 'I'm three minutes to; not far out. Driver there he's anxious not to be wrong by so much as a second,' he added conversationally to the passengers in general.

'And quite right, too,' nodded an old woman. 'Seems to me our country lads 'ud know if us misremembered. Us lawst two,' she confided, looking round at a young woman with several children, and a middle-aged lady, who with old Matt and a carpenter with a bag of tools, completed the meagre load of the single deck bus.

'All got poppies, I sees,' remarked the carpenter. 'Called at my cottage afore seven they did.'

'Mum saved ours from last year,' piped the eldest of the little boys.

His mother crimsoned.

'Us live away from the poppy sellers, right in the woods,' she said. 'I be bound we'll be able ter buy fresh poppies in Horsham?' she inquired with an anxious look at the conductor.

'No doubt, Mum,' said that worthy gruffly.

'You didn't ought to 'ave said that, Tom,' she scolded in an undertone. 'When we allers gaws ter Horsham this day ter see Gran, an' you named arter your uncle what was killed an' all.' Her feelings overcame her and she gave the too outspoken Tom a slight shake.

The sun was fast dispelling the morning fog. From one side of the lane rose a wooded hill; the chestnut trees were bare, but their leaves making a royal carpet, and a little breeze rustling the multi-coloured leaves remaining on the branches. Beyond a low hedge on the left stretched an immense field on which four men were at work with their ploughs.

The bus finally came to a standstill by the side of a clearing in the wood, and the driver stopped his engine while the conductor looked in on the passengers.

'If you like to stand in the lane we'll not go on without you,' he said shyly, his clean-shaven young face becoming very pink.

'Naw, Mother,' urged old Matt familiarly, knocking out his pipe and pocketing it. Having hoisted himself up he grasped the old woman's skinny arm (in his zeal knocking her black bonnet crooked) and helped her down the steps. Soon all the little company were in the lane, along which strolled a man with a gun, a cocker dog at his heels. Nodding at the driver he too halted, and, cap in hand, stood motionless.

Absolute silence followed. The men stood by their ploughs, the horses looking round in surprise at being stopped in so unwonted a place as the middle of the furrows. Down the clearing sauntered a fine cock pheasant and out of the wood came a fox stalking the unconscious bird against the breeze. The spaniel looked up at his master, who frowned and shook his head, whereupon the dog remained motionless, only his nose quivering as the pheasant realizing the presence of his enemy flew over the lane clucking loudly. One of the onlookers expected the man to shoot, but this was a misjudgement – not for all the pheasant in Sussex would the sportsman have broken the silence, and the bird flew safely away even as the disappointed fox retreated unharassed to his den. A tear trickled down the wrinkled face of the old woman, the soft sound of a falling leaf seeming to merely accentuate the stillness.

Suddenly the throb of a re-starting lorry engine on the Horsham road nearby roused all the little group from their dreams; sportsman and dog moved away up the clearing, the middle-aged lady passed her eau-de-cologne-scented handkerchief to the old woman. Matt lighted up his pipe again and Tom looked wonderingly at his mother.

'Will there allers be a poppy-silence like this 'ere, Mum?' he asked.

'Reckon there will in these parts, my dear; us dawnt fergit your Uncle Tom an' sich,' answered his mother.

The driver was already in his seat and started his engine at the same time as the ploughmen urged their teams forwards. The conductor, having very gently settled the tearful old woman in her corner, hustled in the rest of the passengers, coughed sternly, and rang the bell several times.

'Come along, come along,' he said gruffly to no one in particular. 'Can't hang about all day.'

Old Matt winked at the others.

'Sussex dawn't fergit, but there's more ways nor one o' remembrancing,' he remarked wisely.

1. A turnip is a sort of pocket-watch.

Published in *The Worthing Herald*, 11th November 1933.

Still tracking Eleanor Boniface

Shaun Cooper

In June I began playing 'Horizon Zero Dawn', which is an immersive PS4 console video game about a girl who hunts robotic dinosaurs and, following the death of her father, sets out to find the mother she never knew. It is not the kind of game that can be completed in a few hours, or even within a week. Indeed, there was one day when I spent ten hours playing it. Yet, although the game is very beautiful to look at and excellent fun, I was also just then beginning a new phase of my research into Eleanor Boniface; and to be honest, I could not tell you which is the more exciting and the more challenging – researching her or playing the game. In some ways, the two even have much in common: both involve me looking for evidence and clues to find someone I do not know, in a strange and unfamiliar environment, and, along the way, developing new skills.

Some of the new skills I've acquired came about through using the British Newspaper Archive on-line, in order to find more Sussex witch legends – and indeed, I now have twenty more Sussex witches to write about, which means I can make a revised edition of my book *British Witch Legends of Sussex*. But, it was also through using the newspaper archive that I discovered the two previously unknown Rhoda Leigh tales, originally published in *The Worthing Herald* in 1933, which have been reproduced in the last *PSM* and in this one; and also, it was through an advertisement in an old Sussex newspaper in the archive that I found out about the book *Sussex Song* (1927) which includes two poems by Eleanor Boniface. One of these poems is reproduced below – and, by the time you read this, I may well have completed 'Horizon Zero Dawn'; however, it's very likely that I'll still be searching for Eleanor Boniface.

Wooding

I go wooding these fair days
'Crost the down a lil' ways,
To where the sheep-track turns and stops,
Jest 'longside of Burnt Oak Copse.

I feels healthful in that air,
Gleams a sleepmouse harvest there,
Wild-ash berries, chunks o' root,

And a tidy dish of fruit.

Sticks a-plenty, short and thick,
Laying in the old dry dik.
That's as well, for not nohow
Can I handle a gurt bough.

Crabs I gathers, for a few
Do smart up blackberry stew.
White and shining like a plate,
Mushrooms, if I bain't too late.

Robin flits along of me,
Seems he's glad of company;
But blackbirds scuffling the leaves
Scratches out: 'Here's thieves! Here's
thieves!'

When I rests, I rest with care,
Don't choose wood for my armchair,

Seeing once in a tree-stam
Six young vipers and their dam.

When the sun gets shining low,
Making copse all in a glow,
Through the bramble-bars I peep
For to watch the rabbits leap.

Watch the pheasant strut and walk,
Hear him 'clock' – that's roosting talk!
See him puff his chest with pride –
No! I never steps inside.

Keeper, he might come round,
Swear me off the holy ground.
So, where sheeptrack stops, I stops,
Jest 'longside of Burnt Oak Copse.

For more about Burnt Oak Copse and Eleanor
Boniface see *PSM* March 2016.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

ACROSS

6 Rake, 7 Dips, 8 Heron, 10 Heyshott, 11 Nash, 12 Byre, 13 Plaistow, 15 Bramber, 17 Planets,
20 Starrier, 22 Oxen, 25 Anne, 26 Charlton, 27 Field, 28 Herd, 29 Star

DOWN

1 Rapes, 2 Selsey, 3 Epitaph, 4 Tennyson, 5 Lodsworth, 9 Haha, 14 Britannia, 16 Martello,
18 Leonard, 19 Cricket, 21 Iron, 23 Enlist, 24 Roman

