

# The Researcher



NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST SUSSEX ARCHIVES SOCIETY  
THE FRIENDS OF THE WEST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE

## Welcome Back: West Sussex Record Office Reopens

On 18 August we reopened our doors after five months in lockdown. It was so good to be able to welcome everyone back after such a long absence. After a lot of planning and preparation the Search Room is now open albeit with a new layout and procedures to keep everyone safe during the ongoing pandemic.

We are currently open for two days a week with two sessions a day and a lunchtime closure to enable us to carry out a rigorous cleaning routine ready for the afternoon. We have four document seats and one map table space available and are asking people to pre-book and order their documents in advance (up to a maximum of six) so that we can make sure that everything is quarantined for 72 hours before and after use.

Due to the size and layout of the building we still cannot have all the staff back at once. Most of us are therefore working from home for part of the week with meetings held remotely and telephone conversations taking the place of face-to-face discussions. We miss being able to see everyone every day but really enjoy the times when we are in the office and some kind of normality prevails.

<https://westsussexrecordofficeblog.com/2020/08/10/welcome-back-a-new-normal-for-the-searchroom/#more-5756>

Whilst the number of people in the Search Room is restricted, our mailboxes have increased with more people making enquiries and asking for help and advice. In order to help those who are unable to come in we have launched a special offer on our Research Service for the next six months: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/news/special-offer-from-record-office-for-historical-research/>. We are also looking at options to increase our online services so that we can offer more to people at home and find alternative and creative ways of delivering the things we can no longer do in person during the pandemic.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

**31st October 2020**  
**THE WOMEN'S LAND  
ARMY**

This event will now be taking place as an **online webinar** via Zoom.

Details on page 3



**OCTOBER 2020**  
**ISSUE 111**

West Sussex Unwrapped demonstrated the widespread interest and engagement with digital resources over the summer and we are now working with our colleagues at Screen Archive South East (SASE) to see what we can do next.

Archives continue to come into us as well as finding their way into the saleroom. Our COVID-19 Community Archive continues to grow with diaries and other records being deposited in the Record Office while films and videos go to SASE and artworks and objects to The Novium. In August we received the wonderful news that we had been awarded the annual Business Archives Council cataloguing grant of £4000 for the Sir Freddie Laker Archive. The archive was deposited with us last year and charts the rise and fall of Laker Airways and Skytrain, two ground breaking operations which helped to bring transatlantic travel within the grasp of ordinary people.

Founded in 1966, Laker Airways flew mainly from Gatwick and challenged the grip that larger companies had on transatlantic travel, paving the way for today's budget airlines. Skytrain was launched in 1977 and provided a 'walk on, walk off' service with no reservations at an incredibly low price. Both captured the public imagination and proved to be hugely popular.



Sir Freddie Laker

be able to open up access to this archive. There will also be many people who remember the airline, who travelled with Laker Airways or who worked for the company. We hope to capture some of these stories in due course to add to the archives.



West Sussex Record Office Reopens:  
Social distancing measures in place in the reception area

The archive dates from 1956 to 2004 and includes diaries, press cuttings, photographs and hundreds of moving letters of support sent to Laker following the collapse of his company in 1982, documenting people's experience of travelling with Laker Airways - from the trip of a lifetime to the final chance to visit a sick parent.

The grant will enable us to catalogue the archive and make it available for research. With air travel undergoing another radical transformation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, this seems a particularly appropriate time to

**Wendy Walker**

## WSAS Chairman's Report - October 2020

On Thursday 6th March 1919, The West Sussex Gazette carried the following advertisement: In these Influenza days Halls' Wine is more necessary than ever and a doctor writes "I very often order Hall's Wine for my patients as I find they quickly recover with it".

I cannot offer Halls' Wine, but this edition of our newsletter carries some restorative messages, reminiscences, and insights into the rich heritage of Sussex history. Sufficient, I hope, for you to complete the subscription form enclosed with this mailing and continue your valued support for the West Sussex Record Office.

It is apparent that we will not be able to meet physically for some time but we are able to offer you a virtual talk by Ian Everest on "The Women's Land Army" (details below).

We will continue to send you our quarterly newsletter The Researcher. The next edition will be distributed in January 2021 and I invite you to send to me, at the email given, any contributions you think might be of interest to WSAS. Let us know what your interests are, what chance discoveries you may have made, help you seek, tales to tell, anecdotes from childhood, reflections on visits you have made. In Sussex we are particularly fortunate in our heritage, I venture to write that we are a county beyond compare, no other county has the artefacts we have, stretching back nearly half a million years and in more modern times a plethora of Bronze age tumuli, Iron age settlements, Roman villas, mosaics, road systems, Norman castles and on and on even to our county as the birth place of the first UK astronaut. Each part of the tapestry of our national story has a Sussex thread, and for many the custodian of many of these strands is our Record Office. We are at an early stage of ensuring that each of the wills held by the Record Office has been transcribed, if you enjoy palaeography let me know and I'll keep you informed as plans develop.

In October next year you will receive West Sussex History Number 89, our editor, Helen Whittle welcomes contributions, no more than 5,000 words, by the end of July next year. Should you wish to discuss an idea with Helen she may be contacted by emailing: [contact@wsas.co.uk](mailto:contact@wsas.co.uk).

In these straitened times your continued support carries an endorsement of the centrality of the Record Office to the preservation of, and access to, our collective memory. Your work, your contributions, your engagement echoes that Sussex meme common in the First World War "We wunt be druv". Let's be hearing from you.

**Philip Robinson**

---

### The Women's Land Army - Online Webinar (via Zoom)

**14:00 on Saturday 31st October**

**Join the Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86482474295>**

**Meeting ID: 864 8247 4295**

If you are new to Zoom, please visit [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us) to sign up for a free account and familiarise yourself with the website or app ahead of the meeting date.

You do not have to appear on camera if you do not wish.

---

## The Conference That Alluded Us In 2020

This is a 'conference report' with a difference! It is about the conference that was supposed to happen on the very day that I am writing this, but which thanks to the pandemic is not taking place. This short piece offers some consolation in providing a taste of what we were hoping to achieve, while at the same time whetting the appetite for what we might still be able to bring off in better times.

Our conference was going to be on the theme of 'Chichester and the Restoration, c.1660-1700'. This was designed to follow up our successful conference of 2019, ably co-ordinated by Helen Whittle, on the impact of the Civil Wars upon Chichester; this topic filled the Assembly Rooms and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who took part. Various ideas fed the thinking behind our projected conference for this year: it would be a natural continuation of the story of what happened after the Civil Wars; it would tackle a neglected period in the city's history when much building work had to be undertaken; it would focus on an important period in the history of the Cathedral and of the Church of England in general; and we had a star-studded cast of speakers!

What is more, we had an important link with Lincoln College, Oxford; our conference would have been a first for them in putting 'Lincoln Unlocked' on the road. The link was in the person of Henry Edes, one time fellow of Lincoln College, and a key Residentiary Canon of Chichester Cathedral, who seems to have co-ordinated so much of the restoration work in the cathedral and close after 1662. He died in 1703 and is buried in the cathedral; his name is well known in Chichester owing to a house dating from this period now owned by West Sussex County Council, namely Edes House. But this was actually the work of his nephew John Edes.

One of our speakers was to have been Mrs Lindsay McCormack, Archivist of Lincoln College, who was going to give us some background on Henry Edes and his rather dissolute life at the college before he seems to have become a reformed character at Chichester. She was going to bring with her a selection of manuscripts and books illustrative of what they have at the college, material which would have complemented an exhibition we hoped to mount drawn from cathedral archives held at WSRO. We were also thinking about a book exhibition drawn from Bishop Henry King's famous library held at the cathedral, lost during the Civil Wars, and partly restored after 1671.

The link with Oxford would have been furthered in having Dr Grant Tapsell, a Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, set our talks in context with his thoughts on the restoration of the Church of England in general. Grant is one of the country's leading experts in this field, author of a biography of Charles II, and a contributor to the second volume of the magisterial Oxford History of Anglicanism produced in 2017. He is working on the life of Archbishop Sancroft, many of whose letters are to be found in the Tanner Manuscripts held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Some of this material would also have informed my own projected talk on the restoration of the cathedral and close, and it is an example of how many important manuscripts for the history of this diocese are to be found in Oxford repositories.

To ground us firmly in Chichester, we had asked Dr Danae Tankard to elaborate on her research on the impact of the Civil Wars on the city, which we had heard something about in 2019. Danae is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Chichester and the General Editor of the Sussex Record Society. She has produced ground-breaking research on the impact of the wars on the buildings of Chichester and is now working on political factionalism and religious dissent in the 1680s. My own research on the excellent archives of the Dean and Chapter, their act books and accounts, would have complemented her work with details of some of the buildings and costs incurred within the Close.

To aid in setting all of this in context, we had asked Professor Kenneth Fincham of the University of Kent, to talk about the challenges the Restoration of Charles II set for the Church of England and society in general after 1660. He is supremely well placed to talk about this as he was one of the co-founders in 1999 of the 'Clergy of the Church of England Database' project (1540-1835), an on-line resource now indispensable to all local historians. He has written extensively on the history of the Church of England and has edited a number of important volumes for the Church of England Record Society.

We hope we would have presented you with a lively, stimulating conference, one that would have opened your eyes to neglected aspects of the history of the city and cathedral, and perhaps encouraged some of you to join us in more research on these matters. One outcome might have been to have produced an exhibition for both the cathedral and the Novium, for another inspiration for this conference is to be found on the rather small, easily ignored board in the south transept of the cathedral, the one that lists benefactors between 1664 and 1686, some 41 individuals about whom we would like to know more.

We are grateful to all those who put so much work into preparations for this conference, to the speakers we had lined up to talk, to the societies who would have come along to advertise their wares as customary, and can only hope that we will be able to bring you the fruits of this new research in the not too distant future.

**Dr. Andrew Foster**

---

## WSAS Committee

*Philip Robinson - Chairman*

*Leigh Lawson - Vice Chairman*

*Susan Nicel - Treasurer*

*Richard Howell - Secretary*

*Sophie Wood - Newsletter & Website*

*Jane Mant - Membership Secretary*

*Helen Whittle - Journal Editor*

*Susan Millard - Information Manager*

*Jeff Staniforth - Committee Member*

*Wendy Walker - County Archivist*

All contactable using: [contact@wsas.co.uk](mailto:contact@wsas.co.uk)  
Further Society information is available at the website: [www.wsas.co.uk](http://www.wsas.co.uk)

---

## Memories of a Programme Secretary, and Cream Teas

Although I had been a member of WSAS since its inception, and was elected to the committee in 1972, it was not until 1985 that I was elected Vice-Chairman and asked to be Programme Secretary. I had never before been a programme secretary for any society, so I decided I must base my planning on certain principles. I would organise talks that I wanted to hear, arrange visits to places I wanted to see, and inject some adventures into the programme. Finally, I would ensure that we always enjoyed a good tea, and preferably a cream tea.

Of the talks I remember especially Robert Gittings talking about the playwright Thomas Otway on the tercentenary of his death, Mervyn Cutten talking about Sussex pubs in his own pub, the Murrell Arms at Barnham, Fr. Mark Elvins telling us about the medieval Priory at Arundel in the Priory Buildings; and Alison McCann's talk about Petworth in the Town Hall at Petworth followed by her home made mulled wine. We heard Andrew Foster on Bognor, Joan Ham on Storrington, Janet Pennington on Botolphs and Combes, Heather Warne on Burgess Hill and Peter Wilkinson on Westbourne. Peter Brandon spoke on the Sussex landscape, Marie Clough on the early days of Australia, and John Eyre on Richard Prime of Walberton. Jeremy Goring on Sussex and the Spanish Armada, Martin Hayes on local history at the county library, John Houghton on the Sussex Archaeological Society, Frank Kitchen on Armada Beacons and Alison McCann on the career of the Rev. Robert Ferryman.

I happily continued the successful day-conferences at Dunford House in Heyshott (now sadly up for sale), with the successive themes of Arundel, Sussex at Leisure, Horsham and Richard Cobden. But what I remember most is an exchange with one of our members. 'Well, Mr. McCann' he said, 'I don't suppose that tomorrow I will remember a single word of your talk, but I will remember till the day I die than when your wife knocked over your slides into a heap on the floor, you never said a word.'



Castle Goring - Engraving  
Dallaway & Cartwright's *History of Sussex* Vol II Pt 1, p39

We visited Castle Goring, which I had wanted to explore because of the Prince Ranjitsinghi connection and I was delighted to visit Ranji's house in Ireland some years later; and Easebourne Priory. We saw Rymans in Apuldram, W.D. Peckham's old house. We spent an afternoon in West Hoathly and had a conducted tour of Priest's House. When we visited Bailiffscourt we were fortunate to have with us two people who had worked on the original building work at the site. We explored the Roman Villa at Bignor, a visit enlivened by the presence of my son who was making his first archaeological expedition at the age of three months. We walked all round Sindles Farm in Westbourne and explored Hilaire Belloc's house at Kingsland in Shipley, visited the windmill there, and had a splendid tea in the village hall.

The first decision I made as programme secretary was to ask Peter Brandon to organise an annual walk. Peter led us on a series of fascinating walks and had a knack of finding interesting places for tea. The only snag was that he walked so fast that we had to organise a rota system and drew lots to decide who would keep pace with him at the front of the walkers for a set period of time. With Peter we walked round Buncton, the Adur Valley and the surroundings of Pallingham. Other people led walks, notably Tim Hudson in Arundel and Tony Jenner in Washington. I even did so myself, leading a coastal walk at Sidlesham from the Selsey border to Pagham Harbour, and ending with a sumptuous tea in the glasshouses at Rose Croft in Sidlesham by courtesy of Charlie and Mary Roe.

Among our adventures we enjoyed a voyage on the high(ish) seas with a tour of Chichester harbour on the water, embarking from West Itchenor. Continuing the nautical theme we arranged a trip on the river Arun, boarding our craft at Arundel and including a tea at Houghton. I also remember a tour of Combes farm, sitting on bales of straw on the back of wagons pulled by tractors. And then there was our fund-raising wine auction in Richard Hunt's barn at Halnaker, and a book sale held at Shoreham Community Centre.

At one AGM I challenged the Society to a cricket match on behalf of Bishop Carleton's XI, a wandering team made up of members of the Record Office staff and friends and neighbours in the Havant area. Jack Thornberry kindly offered to present a silver cup for us to play for and turned out each year with the cup and two bottles of champagne for the players to enjoy after the game. The Rev. J.H. Bishop gamely umpired all the matches and provided sons for the Society team. We enjoyed some stirring contests at Lancing College, Parham, where my brother and I put on 40 for the first wicket, and Bognor College, but it was hard work choosing both teams and trying to balance the sides. None of us were getting any younger and, after five enjoyable contests, the series was discontinued.

We held our AGMs at County Hall in Chichester, at New England College in Tortington, where we were treated to a splendid sit-down lunch, at Cottessmore School at Buchan Hill and at Windlesham House School in Washington.

And what of the teas? It is difficult to remember the best after thirty five years. The formal tea at Bailiffscourt was something special, but pride of place goes to the wonderful spread that Dr. Mary Shaw provided for the cricketers in the pavilion at Lancing College, the first time the Society played there. Truly an unforgettable feast.

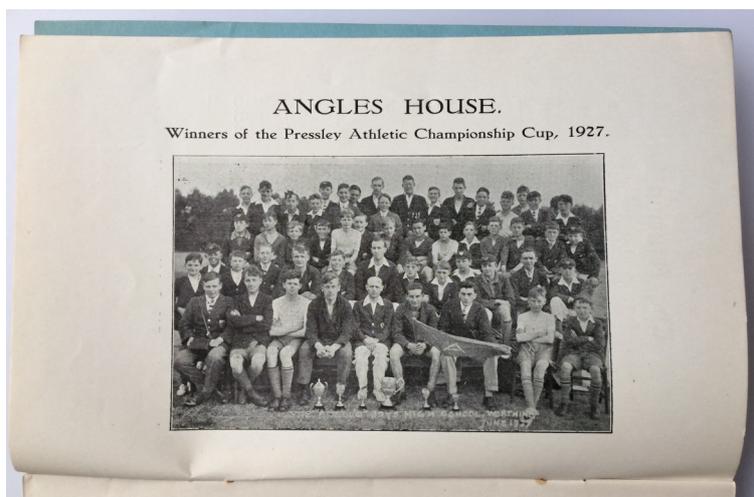
But after five years I found it was getting harder to think of new adventures, and I felt it was time to hand over to another pair of hands. It had proved a very enjoyable task and it was fun to revisit the memories.

**Timothy J. McCann**

---

## Fragments from *The Azurian*

Helping to clear up after the WSAS Book Sale in 2018, I came across an unsold bundle of *The Azurian*, the magazine of Worthing High School for Boys, starting with the first edition in April 1924 through to 1936 with an edition produced each term. I eagerly fell upon it because my father, L. A. D. Speller, was a pupil at the school from 1926 and I hoped to find his name mentioned. I was not disappointed! An unexpected pleasure was the discovery of some interesting articles written by the boys and several surnames still familiar in Worthing, including Chapman, Cortis, Denton, Frampton, Linfield, Punter, Sandell and Scadgell. People whose own fathers also attended the school have asked me to trawl through the magazines to see if their names appear and I have had some success, with each search revealing some new fragment of information.



Angles House, winners of the Pressley Athletic Cup  
on Sports Day 15 June 1927  
Leigh's father, wearing a white vest, is in the back row

Apart from all the usual reports of sporting events and school societies I have found articles written by the boys describing visits to a variety of places such as Steyning livestock market in 1931 - 'the smell of pigs, poultry, sheep, horses, mud and petrol, all rose together in one glorious perfume'; a tour of Croydon Aerodrome where in 1928 passengers were weighed 'so that their seats may be allocated to maintain the balance of the planes', and art trips to London in which lunches at The Piccadilly - 'reluctantly refusing third helpings' - and teas at Lyon's café near Victoria, seem to have been as popular as the exhibitions.

One former pupil contributed his diary of a voyage to Australia as a cadet in the Merchant Navy. Another cadet, who had been one of the first pupils when the school opened on 15 January 1924, wrote six articles spanning four years describing his experiences and what life was really like on board the merchant ship that he called a rusty 'rattle-box'.

Rugby was played in the first years of the school, 'sauntering about the field may be good enough for "Soccer" but quicker movement is necessary for Rugby'. Once the weather had improved in April 1924, the boys had to spend fifteen minutes each day gathering stones in order to clear the field of the newly built school and make it safe to play upon.

Association Football was introduced in January 1929, due to pressure from some of the pupils who preferred the game – my father included.

I was interested to discover the reason for the title of the magazine. It was chosen because azure is the background colour of the coat of arms of West Sussex County Council.

My father was in Angles House and I still have his school scarf – knitted in the High School colours of green and cream, with red stripes for Angles. He had told me about the other houses but it is only now that I have been reminded that their colours were Saxons- dark blue, Jutes - orange and Vikings - light blue.

One boy in Form Lower Va, signing himself ‘ Naturalist’, reported in 1926 on all the birds he had seen in or above the school grounds: a pair of wild swans heard ‘winging their way towards the west’ one sports day; ducks and geese flying past in formation in the early morning. Most commonly in winter there were mixed flocks of gulls which gathered in huge numbers, arriving an hour after dawn and so many that they almost obscured the green of the grass. However he saw smaller birds too and most astonishingly he found the nest of a skylark, which seems unbelievable when you pass the site of the school today in Broadwater on the busy main road out of Worthing.

I have a hitherto undated photograph of my father and other cast members in a school production of Bulldog Drummond. My father played the ‘femme fatale’, Irma Peterson, ‘acting a difficult part very successfully’. I was pleased to find a full report and cast list of the play in the magazine, which has enabled me to clarify the names of the other people in the photograph and to date it December 1929. Thanks were given to all who had helped with the production, including H. J. F Thompson who designed the poster and assisted with the scenery. This name will be familiar to people now, as H. J. F. Thompson went on to write a number books on the history of Littlehampton.



School play Bulldog Drummond December 1929  
left to right: Henry Lackington, Mr. J. T. Turner; Hiram Travers,  
R. L. Woolgar; Carl Peterson, Mr. S. Balister; Captain (Hugh)  
Drummond, Mr. R. Essex; Irma Peterson, L. A.D. Speller

There is a complete collection of The Azurian at West Sussex Record Office.

**Leigh Lawson**

---

## The Great War Memoir of Ralph Ellis, Sussex Artist and Soldier

In August 1917 Second Lieutenant Ralph Gordon Ellis, from Arundel, was walking up to his battalion's new positions near Ypres when he was shot and wounded in his left arm. This 'Blighty' wound probably saved his life, as his battalion was about to go into action at the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele).

During a prolonged period of recovery Ellis wrote a memoir of his two years' service on the Western Front, using notes and sketches he had made at the time. The memoir is the powerful testimony of an ordinary soldier who survived extraordinary events and his words and pictures help us to understand a little of what he and his comrades experienced over a century ago.

Ellis was Arundel born and bred. His father was a taxidermist in the High Street and he attended the local school. By the time he married Gertrude in 1910, when he was 25, he had discovered his talent as an artist and they opened a shop in her hometown of Bognor, selling artist's supplies and home decorating materials, as well as Ellis's paintings.

At the outbreak of war in August 1914 Ellis immediately enlisted with the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment. After a period of tough, physically demanding training, during which Ellis was promoted to lance corporal, his battalion landed in France on June 1<sup>st</sup> 1915. For the next 18 months Ellis was in and out of the front line, both in 'quiet sectors' and occasionally involved in heavy fighting. He soon became involved in observation duties, working with artillery, machine gunners and snipers, and in November 1915 he was promoted to sergeant.

Throughout 1916 the battalion experienced short periods of intense fighting on the front line, interspersed with longer periods in support, reserve, training and rest. In March they saw action at Loos and in July and October they were on the Somme. Ellis's time with the Royal Sussex came to an end in December 1916 when, rather reluctantly, he left to undergo officer training, obtaining a temporary commission in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment in April 1917. Returning to France at the end of May, he was soon appointed Intelligence Officer attached to battalion HQ in charge of directing both sniping and artillery fire, the position he held when he was wounded in August 1917.

Ellis's memoir was originally compiled in five manuscript volumes. It began as a collection of sketches with short captions but evolved into a predominantly written memoir illustrated with drawings and watercolours. This was a conscious decision by Ellis who said that the images 'do not include the more interesting and dramatic subjects seen when one had no time for using the pencil... therefore they were useless as a means of conveying any idea of the life of the Infantry, without words conveying the impressions that remained most vivid in the memory.'

As well as portraying the people and places he encountered both during training and then during his time in France, Ellis put his artistic talent to good use in his role as an observer, pinpointing enemy targets for gunners and snipers. Images across no man's land are rare and Ellis offers an unusual perspective of enemy lines from his vantage points in various observation posts.

But it is his descriptive and detailed text that most powerfully conveys his vivid memories of his experiences. His account of his platoon going up to the front line is an assault on the senses:

'We pass on over the sheltering ridge and the road becomes a part of the other shelled ground. Its surface churned into a thick mass, which tires the feet, fills the shell hole and partially covers the dead mules. The darkness hides much, but in such a place that intense nauseating smell, a combination of fumes from H. E. shells and rotting flesh, the odour of blood and iron. This is sufficient to direct one to the Front.'

Ellis's 'impressions' encompass the life of an infantry battalion on the Western Front, providing a vivid picture of the routine. From the hardships endured by the men while in front line trenches including sentry duties, patrols, wiring parties, the rain, the cold, the exhaustion and the fear, to the sheer hard labour of fatigues and training while in support and reserve, and the absolute joy to be found in a hot bath, clean clothes, a hot meal and a bed in rest.

Central to both images and text is Ellis's love of the landscape. Deeply shocked by the devastation he saw on the Somme in the autumn of 1916, he describes the 'dead brown land' which had been fought over 'foot by foot' with a 'scorching flame, licking the earth to brown ashes, striking down every tree... turning a fair land into stark desolation'. However, he was heartened by the regenerative powers of nature as by the following spring 'Shell holes and trenches were entirely hidden beneath a prolific growth of green vegetation... great masses of small white flowers heaped together like a bridal wreath' and 'deep red poppies, massed together in rivulets of red... in token of the blood so freely spilt here.'

After the war and his convalescence, Ellis spent two years at the Slade art school and then he and Gertrude moved to Arundel to live. He gained a fine reputation as a portrait and landscape painter, and then as a designer and painter of inn signs. Henty and Constable of Arundel gave him a considerable amount of work mainly in Sussex, but as his reputation grew he worked for other breweries in the South-east and further afield. He lived in Maltravers Street, Arundel, for the rest of his life and was an active member of the community. He retired in 1951 but pursued his great love, painting the glorious Sussex countryside, until his death in 1963.

The original memoir is held at West Sussex Record Office together with the archive of the Royal Sussex Regiment.

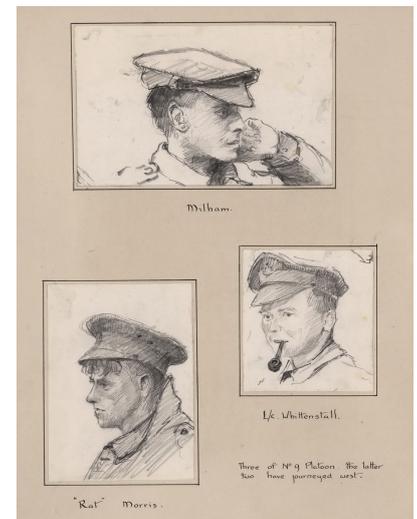
*The Great War Memoir of Ralph Ellis, Sussex Artist and Soldier*, is now on sale to the public and can be ordered through the Sussex Record Society website:

<https://www.sussexrecordsociety.org/ellis-gallery/>

Reference: WSRO Add Mss 25001 – 6

***The Great War Memoir of Ralph Ellis, Sussex Artist and Soldier***, Edited by Sue Hepburn, Sussex Record Society Volume 100, published jointly with West Sussex Record Office.

Price £45 (£40 - Sussex Record Society members). available from Sussex Record Society, Barbican House, High Street, Lewes, BN7 1YE [sussexrecordsociety.org/society-publications](https://www.sussexrecordsociety.org/society-publications)



"Three of No 9 Platoon, the latter two have journeyed west"

**Sue Hepburn**

## Exceedingly Good Country Houses

As a child, before it was the norm to go abroad for one's summer holidays, I used to go away with my parents to such exotic locations such as Margate, Lowestoft and Llandudno. Although I was allowed some days to play on the beach, building sand castles and exploring rock pools, other days would involve setting off to visit some nearby stately pile, where we would respectfully shuffle along past guide ropes, through rooms full of old furniture, family portraits, and bookcases lined with leather bound books, which never looked as though they'd ever been opened since they were placed there a century or more before. Afterwards we would have a wander round the gardens and the day would be rounded off with a cup of tea and a slice of cake in the tea room. I loved visiting these places and glimpsing into past lives. Even in my teenage years I never found this boring, which, on reflection, seems rather strange really!

Over the years I have visited many country houses. Every one is different, from the vast stately homes such as Blenheim or Kedleston, to the more intimate such as Parham and Lanhydrock in Cornwall. Each one has its own character and its own story to tell, which makes the visit so interesting. We often forget how lucky we are in this country to have access to so many of these wonderful places and to share in their history, even if it is only for an afternoon. However, my academic knowledge of these places had been somewhat minimal. Yes, I knew Gothic from Neo-Classical and I could throw in Jacobean and Arts & Crafts, but how did they all relate to each other? Which one was built when and perhaps more importantly, why?

Through a chance encounter I heard of a course that was being offered by the University of Buckingham. This provided the opportunity to study for an M.A. on The English Country House. The course was being run by Adrian Tinniswood, whose books on the English country house I knew, in particular *The Long Weekend*, which is about life in the country house between the wars. The course comprised a series of talks given by experts in their field about different aspects of the Country House, after which we were to write a 25,000 word dissertation on a subject of our choice. I decided to sign up and at the beginning of October 2018 I met up with about a dozen other enthusiasts. The talks took place in the evenings at the Reform Club in Pall Mall. Adrian would introduce each speaker and each one was a specialist in their subject. The evening would finish with a three-course meal with wine and coffee, and lots of good conversation before taking the late train home. It was all a far cry from the rowdy student refectory of my youth!

However, that was the easy bit! The big question was what was I going to write about for my dissertation? One of my favourite houses has been Rudyard Kipling's house, Batemans, near Burwash in East Sussex. It is in a beautiful setting and it has that indefinable quality, 'atmosphere', as though the owners have just left the room. I have always enjoyed Kipling's works, particularly his poems, which for the main part rhyme and scan and you can understand what he is actually saying. However, one of the things that has always slightly irritated me when visiting Batemans, is that there is nothing about the early history of the house. It is as if nothing actually happened there until the Kiplings first saw it in 1900, by which time it was nearly 300 years old. I, therefore, thought I would write about the early history of Batemans, but was then told as I only had 25,000 words (!) I would need to look at a shorter time period. I had reservations about writing about the Kiplings' time there as so



Bateman's

Built in 1634, the Grade 1 listed house located in Burwash, East Sussex, was home of Rudyard Kipling from 1902 until his death in 1936. It was bequeathed to the National Trust on the death of Kipling's widow in 1939. But what of the house before it was Kipling's?

much has been written about Kipling. Was there any more to find out? However, when I discovered that both the Batemans and the Kipling archive are held at the East Sussex Record Office, I decided to go for it, mainly for the practical reason that I can reach the Record Office in half an hour. In the event it proved a good choice, as I spent much more time examining the archives there than I imagined and somewhat to my surprise managed to unearth quite a lot about the Kiplings and how they ran the estate, which, as far as I am aware, hasn't been uncovered before. Lockdown was spent grappling with all 112 pages of the MHRA Referencing Guidelines, but the dissertation has now gone to be assessed and I await the results.

In the meantime, at a WSAS Committee meeting at the end of last year the subject of a conference for 2021 came up for discussion. I suggested that the theme could be 'The West Sussex Country House'. This was met with general approval. I emailed Adrian Tinniswood to ask him if he would be willing to be one of our speakers, and he responded straight away saying he would be delighted. I then approached both Dr. Caroline Adams and Dr. Janet Pennington and both have kindly agreed to give talks at the conference, Janet on Wiston House and Caroline on Cowdray House. This is particularly appropriate as the venue will be at the South Downs Centre at Midhurst, just a few hundred yards from Cowdray. All this, of course, was before Covid 19 reared its ugly head. The date is set for 25 September 2021, so make a note in the diary. We have two other speakers lined up, but for understandable reasons they don't want to commit themselves just yet. However, if all goes well, this has the makings of being an outstanding conference, and hopefully we'll see lots of people there.

**Richard Howell**

---

## Blogs and Building

When in 2014 I was asked to help with the new edition of Nairn and Pevsner's 'Buildings of England' for West Sussex, it meant a return (after many years in Sussex local history) to architectural history, my undergraduate and PhD thesis subject area.

As one of three co-authors my contribution to the book included revising the articles on Arundel, Chichester (fortunately minus the Cathedral and Close, a major task), Midhurst, Petworth, and twenty-plus smaller places in the south-west of the county. Sussex: West, edited by Elizabeth Williamson, duly appeared in May 2019.

'Pevsner authors', as we are known, are invited by the publisher Yale University Press to help with publicity once a volume is out. This can take the traditional form of lectures and articles, but nowadays also posts on social media. Yale UP excels in this, with dedicated pages for 'Pevsner Architectural Guides' on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. To me at the time though the whole area was virtually unknown.

Hence my introduction to the excellent WSRO social media team (Abigail Hartley and Alice Millard), who agreed to help. Their first request was for a general description of the book to coincide with its publication. Next up was a report with photos of the splendid launch party held in Arundel Castle's Barons' Hall.

Meanwhile, I'd offered to continue with publicity for the book through occasional short posts on the WSRO blog dealing with the relationship between architectural history and archives. These would showcase different types of sources, with images of both documents and buildings. So the report of the launch concluded with a brief account of some prints illustrating the history of Arundel Castle.

Between May 2019 and October 2020 nine blog posts in all have appeared, covering such subjects as maps, architectural drawings and models, printed sources, sale catalogues, estate records, and church faculties. All can now be seen together on the WSRO blog at:

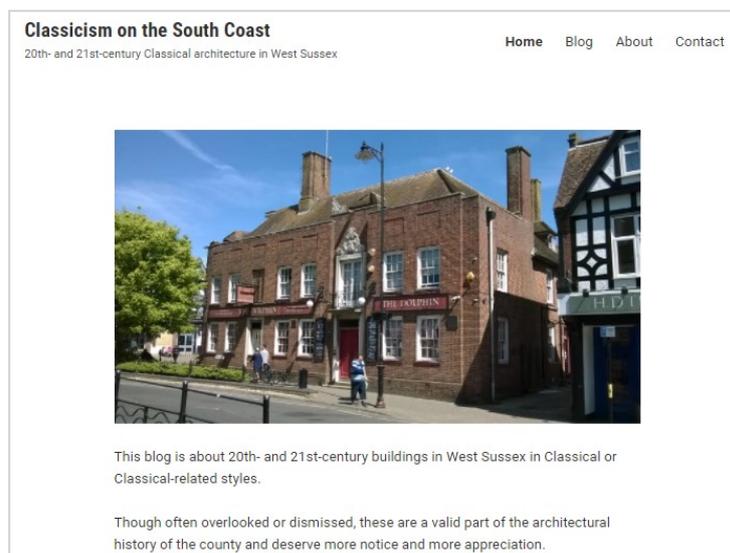
<https://westsussexrecordofficeblog.com/architectural-histories> (pictured right)

The WSRO blog of course includes other posts on historical themes, some written in house and some by 'guest bloggers' like myself. There's no doubt that 'blogging' has become an important way of disseminating historical findings for the future, allowing for up-to-date reporting and the possibility of feedback from readers. It's also usefully a way of communicating with younger people (who are most attuned to social media), and with those who wouldn't be so likely to look at printed material.

The screenshot shows the West Sussex Record Office website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: 'WELCOME BACK! A NEW NORMAL: FOR THE SEARCH ROOM', 'WEST SUSSEX UNRAFFED', and 'ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIES'. The main heading is 'West Sussex Record Office' with the tagline 'Celebrating our collections dating from 1800 to the present day'. Below this is the 'Architectural Histories' section, which includes a sub-heading 'A series of blogs dedicated to architectural history by guest bloggers. Tim Hudson.' The main content area features five blog posts, each with a thumbnail image and a title: 'Historic records and architectural histories: Faculties', 'Historic records and architectural histories: Petworth', 'Historic records and architectural histories: Sussex Sales Particulars', 'Historic records and architectural histories: Printed sources and Chichester Cathedral', and 'Historic records and architectural histories: drawings and models'. To the right of the blog posts is a sidebar with a search bar, a 'Blog Archive' dropdown menu, and a Twitter feed showing a tweet from @WestSussexArchives. At the bottom right, there is a social media widget for the West Sussex Record Office Facebook page.

Following on from the WSRO project I decided to launch a personal blog on architectural history in which I could write about subjects of particular interest, with the aid as before of illustrations. Remarkably, there are very few such blogs in existence, the best known probably being Landed families at [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com), compiled by the former County Archivist of Gloucestershire Nick Kingsley.

It's best if a blog has a single clearly defined theme. What inspired me most was the continuing Classical tradition in 20th- and 21st-century architecture – an area often ignored and even more often depreciated. Hence 'Classicism on the South Coast' (<https://classicismonthesouthcoast.wordpress.com>), which will have posts on individual places; individual architects and their work, for instance the former County Architect C G Stillman, designer of County Hall; and particular subjects like banks and post offices, garden buildings, and war and other memorials.



[www.classicismonthesouthcoast.wordpress.com](http://www.classicismonthesouthcoast.wordpress.com)

The recent revision of 'Pevsner' makes it easy to identify relevant buildings, making use of descriptions written by myself or my two colleagues on the revision, Elizabeth Williamson and Jeremy Musson.

The blog is hosted by [WordPress.com](http://WordPress.com) free of charge, and looks highly professional on screen; though the process of setting up such a blog is not entirely straightforward, as WordPress's ways of working change from time to time without notice. Interested readers can become subscribers, again free of charge (the WordPress term for them is 'followers'). They receive an email notification whenever a new post appears. It's intended that posts will go out every four to six weeks.

There's scope for many more such historical blogs, on different West Sussex places or subjects. Setting one up is highly recommended, and a definite antidote to Lockdown depression!

**Dr. Tim Hudson**

---

## Palaeography Online Courses

The early days of lockdown pulled the rug from under me. Suddenly I found I had no talks, no workshops - and all forms of research for people (family history, house history) ground to a halt because I need original documents rather than online resources.

I spent 24 hours reeling and then I thought I would offer my palaeography classes online. With help from my son as to what form would be best, I tentatively offered a couple of courses on the National Register of Archives email listserv. This wonderful newscast is used by most archivists, conservators, records managers and people working in libraries and museums. To my surprise, places were snapped up and I've been offering them ever since.

Many of my students were early-career archivists, where they chose to study GDPR or digital preservation over palaeography in their professional qualification, leaving them stranded when their first jobs were in local government or similar. Others were retirees, professional researchers, people doing it for fun, family historians – you name it; lots of people want to look at original documents, given half a chance.

The classes are by typing only on WhatsApp – I decided to stick to this format although the rest of the world is on Zoom, because I need to see clearly what people are typing. Also it leaves a trail of messages which people find useful to go through afterwards. Basically each week I lead participants through images of documents (mostly from West Sussex Record Office, but also the National Archives, West Yorkshire, Essex and Devon) that I have sent out by email beforehand. I don't ask people to look at the documents beforehand – no homework involved, and absolutely no pressure. If people prefer to watch others make mistakes (a bear with yoghurt on its paws – no, not in a manorial document!) and not join in that's fine as well. Lockdown was stressful enough.

People keep saying why don't you do it on Zoom – well, why follow the crowd? Zoom is for work. It does mean nobody is concentrating on how they look (very useful in the really hot weather when I was wearing very little for the evening classes – I won't go into details!) We 'chat' beforehand – people put up pictures of home life – one lady had to help with the lambing on the Cumbrian fells first, another was feeding her very new baby; the students in Qatar National Library gave us updates on their weather! When we were in 15 degrees of sunshine, they were in 51 degrees. The contact with all sorts of people has been wonderful.

I am currently offering my 22nd and 23rd courses; they are always for an hour a week for five weeks, and are run in the morning or in the evening. They cost £30 for the five sessions, with more help in between if people need it. I tend to run two courses concurrently, so that people can swap between the two if it's more convenient. They are run at three levels – Starters, Follow On, and Follow On Further (the latter has a piece by Shakespeare in it!). There is a fourth on Manorial Records, slightly more expensive at £40.

And you can guess what I'm going to say: there will be more, so if you are interested, please do contact me on [caroline@keytothepast.co.uk](mailto:caroline@keytothepast.co.uk)

**Dr Caroline J Adams**

---