December 2020 Issue number 2

Ewhurst History Society Journal

Welcome to the second issue of the Ewhurst History Society Journal. We started the journal as a way of keeping in touch with members while we are unable to meet due to Covid-19 restrictions.

This issue has five articles, all written by members. The recent Remembrance Day commemorations led me to look back at the history behind our own war memorial, which was unveiled 100 years ago. Some members may remember Geoff Harry giving a talk about the astronomer, John Evershed, who lived on Pitch Hill. Geoff has now put this into an article for us. Sue Willis tells us about her extraordinary mother-in-law, who was an ATA pilot in the Second World War. Di Smith has taken a nostalgic look back at the 60s, when she was a bridesmaid. Hazel Munro gives us something to look forward to in the spring, when the rhododendrons come out at Leonardslee, and we can hopefully get out and about again.

We would like to keep the journal going and are hoping that more members will be able to contribute. Articles could be about a wide range of historical subjects – personal memoirs, family history, social history, architecture, industry, antiques and collecting, places to visit, and anything off the beaten track or quirky. Whilst local history is central to our interests, it does not have to be local to the immediate area – 'local history' could be local to anywhere in Surrey, Sussex, your home town, or even somewhere you have been on holiday!

If you have an idea for an article (500 – 1,000 words + a few illustrations) please get in touch with the editor at janet.balchin@googlemail.com

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

By Janet Balchin

On Sunday 8 November 2020, with lockdown restrictions in place, a small group of socially distanced residents gathered at the Ewhurst war memorial to commemorate the fallen. Probably unknown to most people, this was also the centenary of the dedication of the memorial which had taken place at an open-air service on Sunday 7 November 1920.

Even less well known is that Ewhurst nearly had a memorial designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. The war memorial committee had originally approached the famous architect Sir Edwin Lutyens to design a memorial to be erected on the small green opposite the Bull's Head. Lutyens had made his name in the late 19th century designing country houses in the Arts & Crafts style. In the 20th century he moved to a more classical style and took on some large projects, including his work for New Delhi. In 1917 he advised the newly-formed Imperial War Graves Commission on the design and layout of cemeteries, and designed the Stone of Remembrance and the shape for the individual headstones. He also designed the monumental Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. At home, he was responsible for the Cenotaph in Whitehall and 43 other English memorials. These war memorials are now designated as a 'National Collection' in the same way as the 'Wren Churches' are. It would have been wonderful if a memorial in Ewhurst could have been part of this National Collection, but sadly, and somewhat surprisingly, there was opposition to both the design and the proposed site.

Ede's Stores (The Post Office moved from here to The Mount, in 1912). The proposed war memorial would probably have been roughly where the bus shelter is now.

Letters to Reginald Bray, Lord of the Manor of Shere, who owned the green, shed some light on the matter. In December 1919, Fred Carpenter, the secretary of the committee, wrote to Reginald Bray *"Sir E. Lutyens has been employed by the committee to furnish a design. He came down in October and met the committee and promised to send his sketch before leaving for India on Nov 1st but it has not been received. As soon as the design is received a meeting will be called to consider it; it was recognised that your consent would be required but it was thought better to defer troubling you until the design was approved."*

The Rev. Andrew Hamlyn, one of the objectors, came up with an alternative suggestion of a lych-gate at the entrance to the church. He wrote to Reginald Bray, *"There are many in this parish who object to the War Memorial being erected on the village green, and their objection is not only grounded on the unsuitableness of that site but also on the fact that to a large extent it would prevent the children from playing there in the summer and*

taking shelter from the passing traffic. No doubt you are aware that the Edes who have their shop facing the green are very strongly opposed to an Altar Tomb about 4ft high on steps. I am convinced that the children of another generation will consider it a splendid object for climbing over and jumping from, as there is no proposal to guard it in any way. Personally I strongly object to the site and the Altar Tomb. The alternative scheme, which meets with the approval of church people, generally, and many dissenters, is a lych-gate at the entrance to our churchyard with the names of the fallen on panels. Such a memorial would greatly improve the central part of the village and adjoining the post office it can be seen what a most suitable site that would be and how much it would improve the entrance to the churchyard. I am, of course, strongly in favour of that scheme. The majority of those who favour the village green have most to say and for certain would give very little to help financially. I am sure that all the reasonable and respectable parishioners would be very glad if, as Lord of the Manor, you refused permission for the village green site."

Fred Carpenter pointed out that four well-attended public meetings had been held and that the resolution had been overwhelmingly passed in favour of the village green. However, it would appear that the four objections made to Reginald Bray were enough to scupper the plans and the committee scaled down their plans. It was eventually agreed to erect a Celtic cross on The Mount. It is made of Cornish granite, but it is not known who designed it. The cost of £250 was raised largely by public subscriptions from notable residents - Sir Dugald Clerk gave fifty guineas; The Rev. Stopford Brooke, Prof. Frecheville, Walter Webb and William Rigby gave twenty guineas; Sir George Johnston and Col. & Mrs Creswell gave ten guineas and Frederick Carpenter gave five guineas; the balance of £80 was raised by villagers. The rector would have to wait until 1929 for his lych-gate, which was built with money left to the church by Benjamin William Broomer.

The Dedication of the War Memorial on The Mount 7 November 1920

The memorial was unveiled at a United Dedication Service on 7 November 1920 by the chairman of the War Memorial Committee, and former chairman of the Parish Council, Walter Webb, whose own son was one of those commemorated. The Rev. Andrew Hamlyn dedicated the memorial, and the lesson was read

by Gabriel Woodward, the Congregational minister. After the sounding of The Last Post the service closed with the National Anthem.

Before the First World War monuments had been mostly erected to celebrate Victory and featured heroic leaders. The unprecedented losses of 1914 - 1918 led to a different approach, with the emphasis on Sacrifice and Remembrance and particularly recognising the importance of the contribution of the individual. Early on in the war the decision had been made that no bodies would be repatriated. This was partly because it was recognised that it would be mainly the wealthy families who would be able to bring their boys home, and also because so many men were simply lost and have no known grave. Because of this the local memorials took on a specific focus for the families.

The war memorial bears the names of 51 men, but it is not known what the criteria were for the inclusion of a name. Whilst most can be considered to be 'Ewhurst men' who were born or lived here, there are some for whom the connection is less clear-cut. Three names were added later and are therefore out of alphabetical order. Brass plaques, bearing the original 48 names, were also placed in the Parish Church and the Congregational Church (now the Baptist Church). One of the missing names was added to the plaque in the Congregational Church.

As well as being on the Ewhurst memorial the eight men from Ellen's Green were commemorated on a stone seat at Ellen's Green; the panel bearing the names is now in Ellen's Green Memorial Hall.

The memorial seat at Ellen's Green.

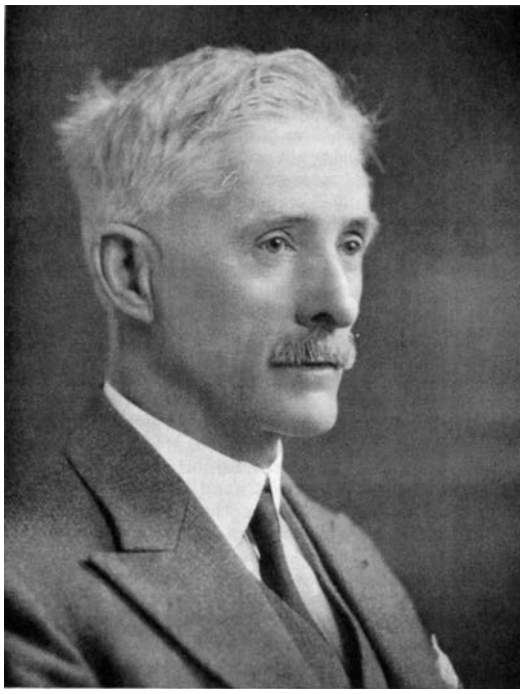
The panel with the names is now in the Memorial Hall, which is the memorial to the Second World War.

It was quite common for men to be remembered on more than one memorial. In addition to local memorials there were regimental memorials, school memorials, workplace memorials, and of course, the Imperial (Commonwealth) War Grave memorials to The Missing in France.

The memorial on The Mount bears the names of those who died in the First World War. The memorial to the Second World War and the Korean War is the Recreation Ground which was designed to be a 'living memorial', but that's another story.

THE EVERSHED EFFECT

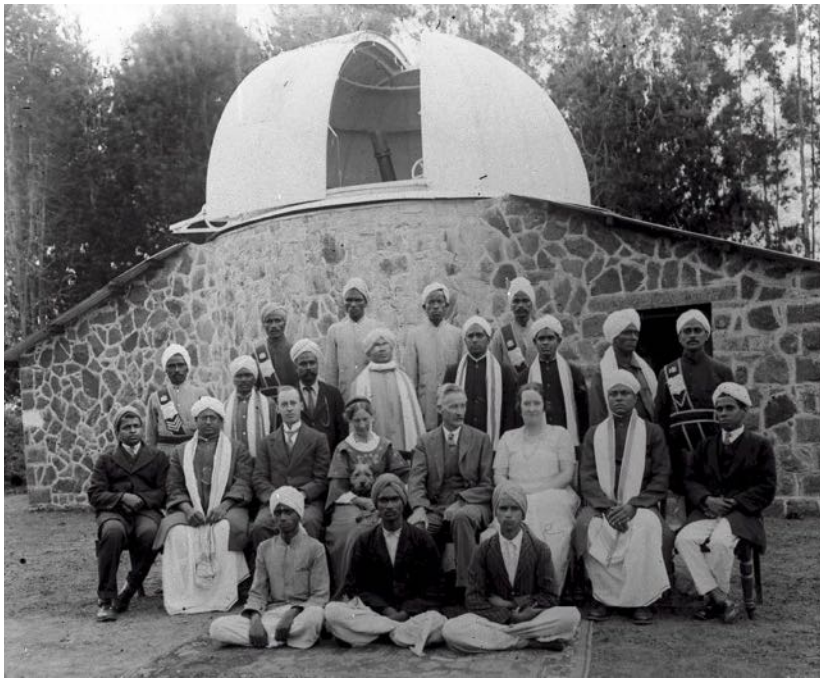
By Geoff Harry



John Evershed, C.I.E., F.R.S., F.R.A.S., was a distinguished solar spectroscopist who lived in Ewhurst from 1924 until his death in 1953 aged 92. During his lifetime he had known and worked with many of the world's famous astronomers and his detailed observations and measurements led to a new understanding of the behaviour of sunspots. In addition he was an accomplished photographer and a keen observer of nature.

His father's family had lived in Surrey for many generations and John was born in Gomshall where his family owned and ran the Gomshall Tannery. In 1875, at the age of 11, he ran from Gomshall to Shere to see the partial eclipse in the family doctor's telescope. He saw sunspots and the solar prominences for the first time and this started a lifelong interest in the sun.

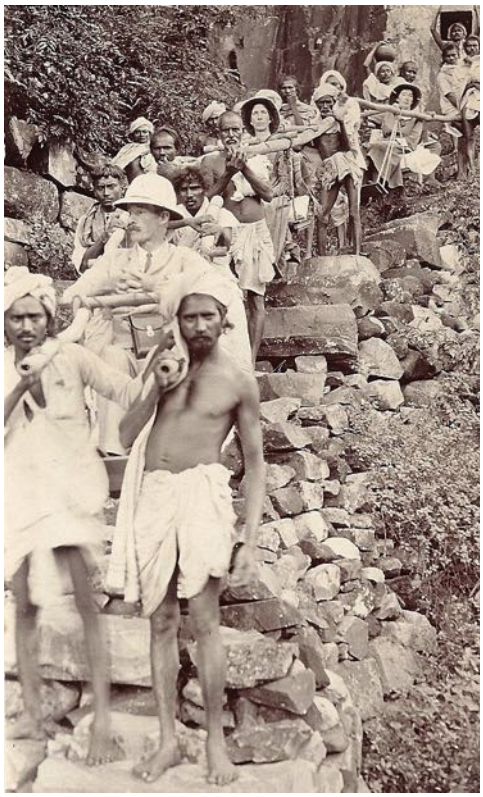
He began work as an industrial chemist and this gave him the knowledge and expertise to conduct his first solar spectral observations as an amateur astronomer. He was a founder member of the British Astronomical Association in 1890 and for a time directed the association's section of solar spectroscopic observers - an enthusiastic band inspired by the great discoveries of Lockyer, Janssen, and later of George Ellery Hale. Independently of Hale, he hit on the fundamental idea of the spectroheliograph, the "Evershed Spectroscope".

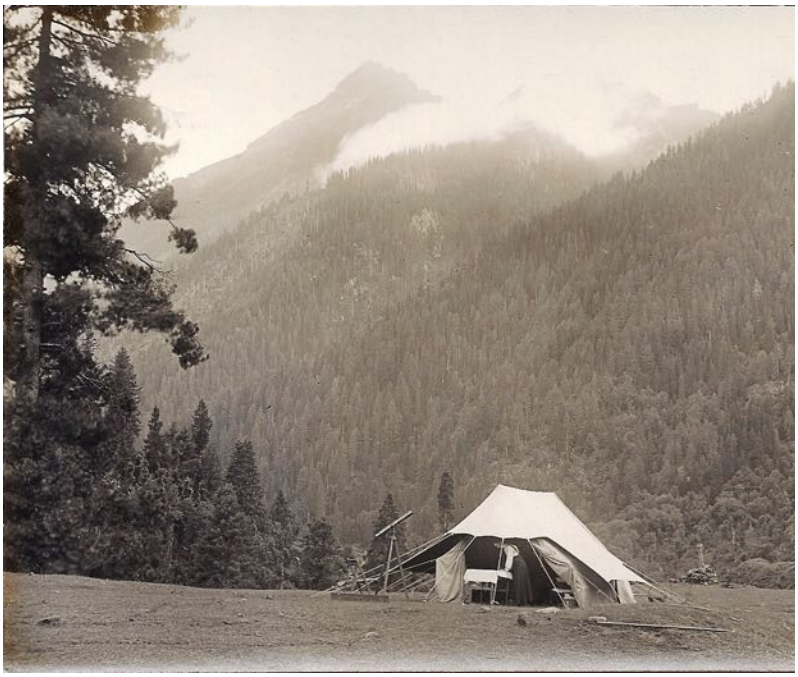


John Evershed, centre, with his wife Mary (in white dress) at Kodaikanal in 1911.

In this period, he travelled to four eclipses around the world. He gained a reputation for accuracy and his improved measurements of solar wavelengths were quoted by the standard German handbook of spectroscopy. In 1906 he was appointed assistant director of Kodaikanal Observatory, Southern India. He

threw himself energetically into the opportunity of working professionally with apparatus more suited to his abilities, greatly improving the standards of efficiency in the routine work of the observatory. In 1909 came the discovery for which he is perhaps best remembered, the radial motion of the sun's plasma in sunspots – The Evershed Effect. He undertook three lengthy expeditions to Kashmir where the visibility was exceptional, due to the altitude. These journeys are beautifully recorded in the photographs which he expertly processed himself. This and other work of Kodaikanal earned him the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1918. His directorship set a high standard and laid the foundations for consigning the observatory work entirely into Indian hands. Even today, the time he spent there is known as "The golden age of astronomy in India".





The Eversheds travelling in Kashmir.

On retirement in 1923 he returned to England, where he received the honour of Companion of the Indian Empire. Instead of retiring into a quiet and inactive old age, he embarked with unflagging enthusiasm on a new programme of private observations. He erected a solar observatory in an underground pit at his new home at Highbroom in Ewhurst. It was equipped with some of the most powerful apparatus in the world. With this he carried out further systematic observations of prominences, sunspot spectra, and of the "red-shift", one of the three crucial tests of Einstein's relativity theory. Impressed by the power of liquid prisms he continually experimented with fresh apparatus, demonstrating that, given his skill, results comparable with those of the 150-ft. telescope at Mount Wilson, California, could be obtained. In 1953, aged 89, he closed his observatory and presented some of the instruments to the Royal Greenwich Observatory at Herstmonseux Castle.

Evershed was a fine example of the practical craftsman who could design, construct and use delicate apparatus for probing nature's secrets. Although astronomy, and particularly solar physics, formed his prevailing interest in life, he also had a keen interest in natural history. Moths and butterflies proved to be an important side-line and during his Indian days he made a noteworthy collection of tropical specimens and co-wrote a book about them. With these and other topics he could delight an audience with a characteristic boyish enthusiasm.

John Evershed married twice. His first wife, Mary Acworth Orr, shared his astronomical interests and worked with him during their 43 years of marriage. She was a member of the British Astronomical Association, as women were not allowed to join the Royal Astronomical Society, and founded its Historical Section in 1930 and was its Director until 1944. She died in 1949 and is buried in Ewhurst.

In 1950 he married Margaret Randall, of Cranleigh; she continued to live in Ewhurst until her death in 1990. He died in 1956.

John Evershed, with his telescope in the garden at Highbroom.

The telescope and instruments have been removed but the building is still in the garden.

My thanks to Sue Stevens, step-niece of John Evershed, and Carolyn & Bill Bruford of Highbroom.

GRANDMA (AND HER FRIENDS) FLEW SPITFIRES!

By Sue Willis

We hear a lot these days about women playing a more important role in life and being recognised for their determination, bravery, intelligence and ability to stand on an equal footing with men. This is a story about my mother-in-law and some of her friends who were all those things and able to prove it during the war but were modest about their achievements and when, during the early years of the 21st century, the media started to recognise these women, they wondered what all the fuss was about.

The Air Transport Auxiliary was set up during the Second World War to ferry aircraft from factories to airfields or maintenance units where they would then be fitted out with navigation equipment, guns and accessories. 168 of these pilots were women and these intrepid women were called upon to fly any of 147 different aircraft with hardly any training, no radios or navigation equipment, just a handbook, Ferry Pilot's Notes, a map and the hope of good weather so that they could navigate by looking out of the window for landmarks, church spires, railway lines, mountains and coastlines. From 1943 they received equal pay to their male co-workers, a first for the British Government, making ATA one of the first Equal Opportunities Employers. The ATA was known firstly as Ancient and Tattered Airmen or Anything To Anywhere before women joined in when it became Always Terrified Airwomen.

Benedetta Day was born in Cyprus in 1914 where her father was a civil engineer, building bridges. The family returned to England when Bene was 10 and she went to boarding school, became Head Girl and went on to study architecture where, with typical understatement, she said her most important task was to identify all the metal railings in London, which could be torn up and used in the war effort. With a small inheritance shared with her 3 sisters, who all bought sports cars, she bought a second hand Gipsy Moth biplane called Vagabond and at the age of 23 she gained her pilot's licence. Her flying instructor was Charles Willis and in June 1938 they married and flew to the Isle of Wight, in Vagabond, for their honeymoon.

Now married she was happy to leave her job as an architect's assistant and in 1939 she had her first child. After her second child she heard about the ATA and Charles, now in the RAF, encouraged her to apply. She was accepted in September 1941 as a First Officer and settled into life at the women's ferry pool at Hamble, the children being cared for by a nanny at her mother's house in Chertsey.

She flew over 40 types of aircraft including the amphibious Walrus, loathed by all the women and the one responsible for her only accident. She said it was like trying to fly a brick. Bene miscalculated the wind when coming in to land and the plane sustained a damaged float. Fortunately she was unhurt but saddened that people remembered her for the accident rather than for the 100 plus Spitfires that she delivered without incident during her 2 years at Hamble. She left Hamble in 1943, admitting to being

pregnant after not daring to disclose that she already had two children! Those friendships made in the ATA were to last a lifetime.

I was lucky enough to know many of these friends as sweet elderly ladies with fascinating pasts. Philippa Bennett, or 'Auntie Phil Booth', was my husband's godmother, a wonderful character who, together with Flying Officer Margot Gore, told the amusing tale of being measured for trousers at the Maidenhead tailor who kitted out the male pilots with their uniforms. Three nervous men were involved in this charade - waist and hips went well but the bust area caused some consternation and the inside leg measurement proved so inaccurate that when the girls finally received their long awaited uniforms, the seats of their trousers hung so low they had to send them back, with chalked instructions and a sharp note. Auntie Phil was one of just 11 women cleared to fly 4-engined bombers with the rank of Flight Captain. She flew the dreaded Walrus 41 times, only once forgetting to pump the wheels down and having to land on the underwing floats - with no damage! After the war she ran an air taxi company.

Audrey Sale-Barker, who won some free flying lessons in a competition and earned her 'A' licence at the age of 19 after just 7 hours of instruction. She was captain of the British ski team for the 1936 winter Olympics, and won many individual ski trophies but found flying was 'even more exciting than skiing'. She inherited some money in 1931 and bought a Gipsy Moth, married Malcolm (Geordie) Douglas-Hamilton and became Countess of Selkirk. In the late 1980s I was living in Dorset, near their home in Wimborne, and Lady Selkirk asked if I would do the catering for her husband's 80th birthday. I went to their house to discuss the requirements and he was watching Wimbledon and making toast on the end of a long poker in front of an electric bar heater. He didn't turn off the TV and he didn't want a party. But Audrey persevered and told me she would provide the champagne from their cellar in Sloane Square and I would buy the 'fizz' for Buck's Fizz. In the event their champagne proved undrinkable and we had to serve the fizz as champagne and the real champagne was masked by orange juice - no-one was any the wiser, Geordie got quite drunk and even appeared to enjoy himself.

Joy Lofthouse, who learnt to fly before she could drive a car, was one of just 17 women accepted by the ATA from 2,000 applicants at the time. After just 12 hours of instruction she began flying Tiger Moths and eventually 18 different types of plane but Spitfires were her favourite (They were everyone's favourite!) When war ended she wondered if anything was going to be as exciting for the rest of her life. 'It gave many women something they'd never had - independence, earning your own money and being your own person. We were trailblazers for women's emancipation'. When the remaining 'Attagirls' were finally awarded a veteran's badge by Gordon Brown in 2008 she said 'for 60 years nobody asked me about my wartime job, but for the past ten I've been dining out on it'. In 2015 she was invited to fly a Spitfire again for the first time since 1945. She was 92 and said 'it was lovely, quite perfect'.

Mary Ellis was 11 when she first flew in a Gipsy Moth and at 16 she was allowed time off from school for flying lessons. In 1941 she was accepted into the ATA at the age of 22. Mary and Bene were near neighbours in the Isle of Wight and one Christmas I was asked to deliver her Christmas present from Bene. Mary and her husband Don lived at Sandown Airport having both been connected to the airport since the war. I rang the bell but there was no reply. Tried again and wondered if they were trying to pretend they were out but at the third attempt Mary opened the door and despite appearing to be surprised that I was standing on her doorstep, invited me in to join them for tea which was neatly laid out with cups and saucers, silver teapot, sugar cubes with tongs, tiny sandwiches and good old Victoria Sponge. They were both delightful and chatty once they remembered I was Bene's daughter-in-law but had completely forgotten who they were expecting for tea!

Bene was to be reminded of her flying days when in 1984 a newspaper article claimed that the RAF said 'no lady had yet gained RAF pilot "wings"'. She was incensed at the injustice and immediately wrote to the newspaper with proof that in 1953 she joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and after 6 weeks of intensive training with theory and practical tests she was awarded her wings on 28th August 1953. She was the second of only 5 women to get their full wings in the 1950s.

BENEDETTA WON HER WINGS

AN Isle of Wight grandmother who flew Spitfires during the war has shot down official claims that no women had won RAF "wings".

RAF claim shot down by flier

By Dominic Killyard

Mrs. Benedetta Willis of Bembridge produced evidence to the Echo that she was awarded the coveted insignia in 1953.

Confirmation that the "wings" she proudly showed me were genuine came from an entry in her service record book stamped August 28 of that year.

In a follow up to an Echo story about another woman flier, the Ministry of Defence said that no lady had yet gained RAF pilot "wings".

Now after another approach from the Echo, they are searching deeper into their archives — "We are re-checking our records."

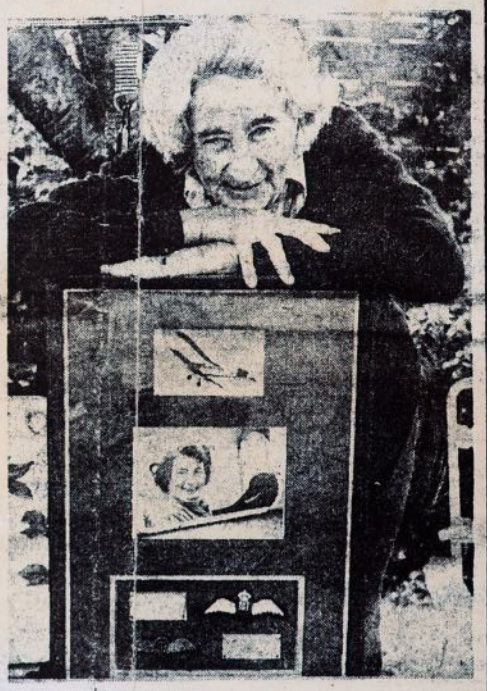
Mrs. Willis, now 70, said that four other women had also reached the required standard at the same time as her — all having undertaken a strenuous six-week course at RAF Feltwell.

She said this followed previous flying experience during the war years for the Air Transport Auxiliary on such aircraft as Spitfires, Hurricanes and Wellingtons.

Her husband Charles, a former Squadron Leader, also has RAF "wings", thus making them a unique flying couple.

Mrs. Willis said, "The RAF are probably worried about admitting the facts, because they might feel it would open the floodgates.

"They have always been worried that by engaging women pilots, there might be the risk that one day they would have to use them in active service."



SPITFIRE PILOT: Benedetta Willis displays her "wings".

My father-in-law left the RAF at the end of the war and joined the Midland Bank but he had also won his wings, which made them a unique flying couple. Charles died in 1990 and Bene in 2008.

Bene with a Hurricane, just before her death in 2008.

THREE WEDDINGS AND A BATH

By Di Smith

Del Shannon's *Runaway* was playing on the radio that June morning in 1961. I joined the three young women crammed around the breakfast table in singing along. My sister, the bride-to-be, stood up ready to go. "Get a move on," she said as she pinned up her French pleat in the mirror.

Once out the front door, we trooped up the road together in a laughing gaggle. My sister led off with *Are You Lonesome Tonight,* while I admired her new stilettos with their pointed toes.

Our West Croydon terraced house lacked a bathroom and running hot water, which meant a walk to the new slipper baths. We had moved on from hauling our galvanised bath from a nail on the outside wall and its lengthy filling with hot water from the scullery copper. Having female wedding guests, plus the bride and bridesmaid (me), bathing in front of our black range would have been a tall order. I would miss my mother tipping the end of the bath up and down to make waves, but there was no time for games today.

At the baths, our tickets jumped nosily from a tiny metal trapdoor in the counter. A nearby slot machine contained exciting indulgences for a few coppers: a small box of white bath salts and tiny bar of green Palmolive soap, which I could take home afterwards. What an extravagance those echoing baths were, their tiled surfaces so clean and the air so warm.

The smiling, bustling attendant showed us into our personal cubicles. She carried each fluffy white towel over her arm, laying it on the pale wood stool next to a large wooden bath mat. To my child's eye these cubicles were enormous, containing a vast white bath of incredible depth. I undressed in the warm air, poured my bath salts into the water and gazed in wonder at the tiny Palmolive bar on the bath's edge as I climbed into the blissful waters.

Di, aged 7, having recovered from having her hair curled.

At least this time I would not be forced to endure the agony of the hair rollers I had suffered in preparation for my first wedding. I shuddered to remember being abandoned under a huge hooded drier. The heavy temperature control had a rubberised cover and a large switch set into its face, which you could click to adjust the heat. The stylist sat me in the chair, pulled the hood down over my head and placed the weighty controller in my lap. Terrified, the tears rolled silently down my face at being left forever in a world of heat and noise. Even my new, white, peep-toe sandals and bouquet of sweet peas failed to overwrite the terrible memory.

For my second wedding, I had worn a beautiful blue frock. The pale net overskirt had a sprinkling of the tiniest pink and blue flowers. I stared awe-struck in the shop, unable to breathe at the thought of actually taking a *new* shop-bought dress home. Although torture to wear, I did not care. I looked like a fairy. It was difficult to lower my arms over the frilled net ruches edging the arm holes. Those tiny frills were as prickly as hedgehog spines.

Breaking through my reverie, the bath attendant called from outside my cubicle, "Do you want more hot water love?" Hearing my "Yes", she put a large spanner to the highly polished brass plate on her side of the wall. I heard her turn the spanner to gush more hot water into my bath through a wide metal spout.

I luxuriated in the water as I imagined wearing my bridesmaid's frock in fine, white, stippled fabric. It had a golden sash and a rustling paper nylon petticoat that held the skirt out. All the bridesmaids' dresses had been made by a family member. We had prepared the petticoat the day before, soaking it in sugar solution to stiffen its multi-coloured, many layered net frills. A thin hoop provided additional support, sewn into a pocket a few inches from the hem. The two pages would wear red bow ties and matching cummerbunds.

I had more new shoes and short white socks. The older bridesmaid would be wearing white court shoes with a low heel. I had already experimented with my headdress, a circle of stiffened cloth flowers with a yellow ribbon hanging at the back. I had high expectations of a lovely bouquet, but must be patient; it would be waiting at the church.

The rest of the day was full of bustle getting my sister ready, our tiny house jam-packed with willing helpers. At last we were all ready, but our narrow front door proved a challenge. My sister's hired wedding dress was too full to allow her through. Everyone pushed and shoved, careful not to rip the net. Eventually she was out, like a cork from a bottle. At last we could set off for the church.

Di in the pretty, but itchy, 'fairy' dress

Di aged 9, centre, in the home made dress with the sugar soaked petticoat

A POTTED HISTORY OF LEONARDSLEE

by Hazel Munro

Leonardslee is a woodland garden noted for its rhododendrons and azaleas, at Lower Beeding, just to the south of Horsham. After many years of being closed to the public it is now open again (Covid permitting!)

The gardens were once owned by one of the great Victorian plant collectors, Sir Edmund Loder, who imported trees and shrubs from all over the world. He created a majestic setting for his plant collection in a steeply wooded valley, with a string of lakes.

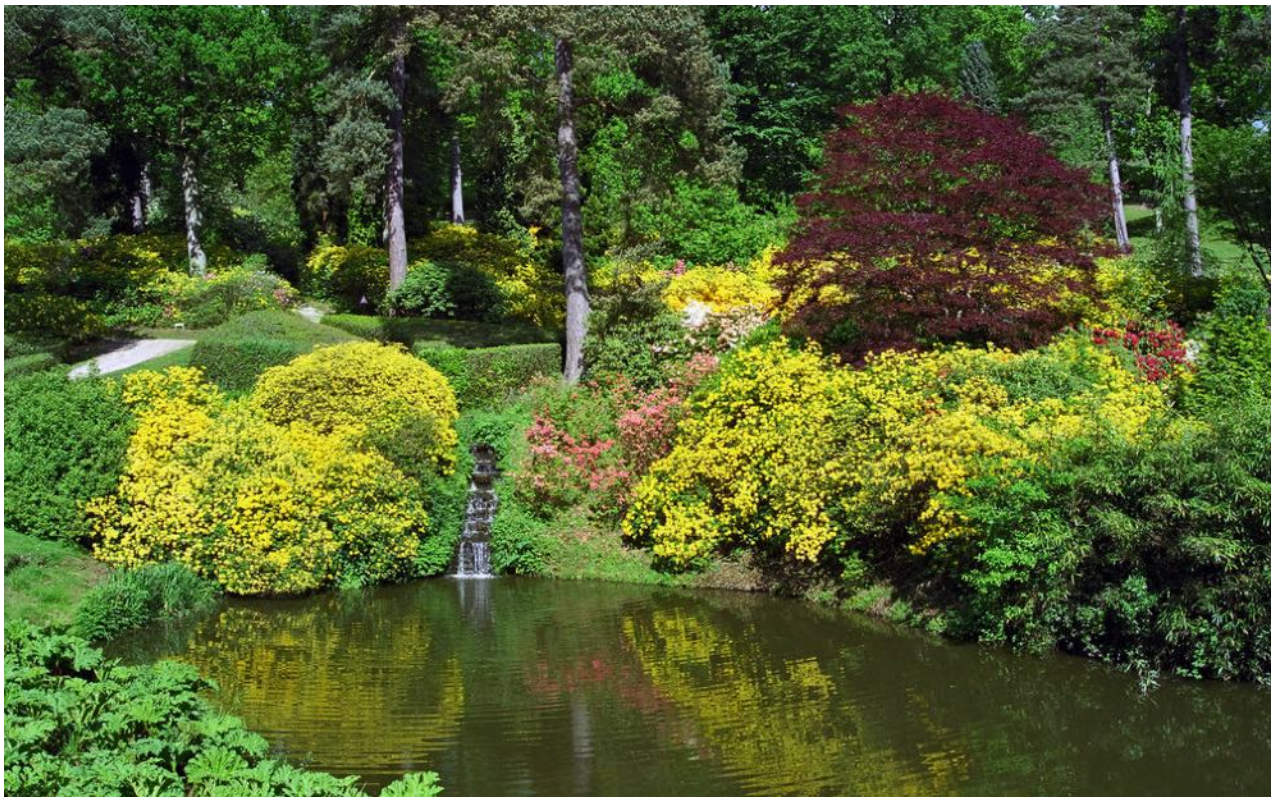
It all started in 1685 when Charles II granted St Leonards Forest to Sir Edward Greaves who used it as a hunting forest for many years, and from him it passed to the Aldridge family. In 1801 a large part of the estate was sold to Charles George Beauclerk, who built a house 'St. Leonards Lodge' and started to lay out the garden and park. The next owner was William Egerton Hubbard who rebuilt the Lodge in 1852 and this is the house that stands today. William's daughter Marion married Edmund Loder and in 1888 Edmund, (by then Sir Edmund, having inherited the title from his father) purchased the estate from his father in-law.

Sir Edmund Loder greatly expanded the gardens and created a new stain of hybrid rhododendrons - *rhododendron loderi,* by crossing Himalayan and Chinese species. He also introduced the mob* of wallabies. After his death in 1920 the gardens suffered from neglect until 1946 when his grandson, Sir Giles Loder, took over. He continued to develop the gardens until 1981.

But in 1984 the mansion was sold and then in 2010 the gardens were also sold and closed to the public.

**collective noun for wallabies*

In 2017 new owners, The Benguela Collection Hospitality Group, owned by the South African-based entrepreneur, Penny Streeter, were able to buy both the house and gardens and reunite the estate. After extensive restorations the gardens were once again opened to the public in 2019.



This is a garden that needs to be visited at different times of the year to appreciate all seasons and colours, but for many people the best time to visit is spring, when you will see the rhododendrons and azaleas looking at their most glorious.

Like most places Leonardslee has been affected by Covid restrictions. If you would like to visit please check the website for opening hours and booking - www.leonardsleegardens.co.uk