

Ewhurst History Society Journal



Welcome to the latest issue of our journal.

Those of you who heard Judie English's excellent talk on Baynards in September may remember the mercury jar which was found on the old moated site. Judie has written an article with more detail for those of you who would like to know more about this fascinating item.

Our speakers for November, Barrie & Marian Heathcote and Mike Fanya, have also written up their memories of fifty years of treading the boards with Ewhurst Players.

Our final article is by Laurie James, the author of 'Independent Bus Operators into Horsham'. Laurie contacted me before Christmas, having acquired a copy of my latest book and looked at our web site. He offered two items of research for the journal, the first of which is published here, and the second will appear in the next issue.

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

A RARE SHERD OF POTTERY FROM BAYNARDS AND THE STORY BEHIND ITS USE

By Judie English

One of many ways of investigating archaeological sites without excavation is fieldwalking – literally walking over a field and collecting objects turned up by the plough. Examining a double-moated site on the Baynards Estate in 1976 produced, as expected, a range of medieval pottery sherds together with a large amount of blast furnace slag from iron production. Although the place-name is not mentioned until 1447, the site is almost certainly that of the early main house for the Baynards Estate and pottery recovered suggested occupation from the 11th to the late 16th centuries.



Left: The double moated site, marked as Pollingfold Mansion on the OS 6" map surveyed in 1871, is almost certainly the original Baynards.

Also found was a strangely shaped piece of a ceramic vessel decorated with green glaze – at the time I thought that, given that the site was the main house of the estate throughout the medieval period, this might be have been a piece of high-status roof furniture. Then, by pure chance, in 2022 Duncan Brown, who is the national expert on mercury jars, came to a meeting in Surrey, and immediately recognised the sherd as coming from one of these very rare vessels.

The fabric suggests the vessel was made somewhere near Seville in Spain, although it may have come from The Levant, and dates to between c. 1250 and c. 1650. We know mercury was imported from Almadén in Spain where one of the world's greatest reserves of cinnabar, the mercury ore, has been exploited since the Iron Age. During the late medieval period ships from Genoa docked at Seville to load amphorae of olive oil for distribution throughout northern Europe and these small jars of mercury became a high value addition to the cargo. Imports listed in the Southampton Port Book for 1430 include eight pots of mercury valued at a total of £28 – over £2000 each in modern terms.

Why Southampton? Much trade had been centred on the docks in London but in the reign of Henry VI (1421-1461 and 1470-141) trouble erupted between local and foreign crews in the pubs and spread into street brawls. There was also jealousy among the merchants since much of the high value trade was being handled by boats from Genoa and Venice. The result of this was that shipping diverted to Southampton, a move exacerbated when taxes were levied on foreign imports.

Why mercury? Despite its toxicity, mercury was widely used for medicinal purposes. Schliemann found a flask of mercury in a tomb at Kurna in Egypt as early as 1600 – 1500 BCE and the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (c. 371 – c. 287 BCE) described its production from cinnabar. Islamic doctors recommended only external use and 'expendable' slaves were used in its production by both Roman and medieval overseers.



In late medieval Europe mercury was used to treat diseases which gave dermatological symptoms, particularly syphilis, where mercury vapour was administered, and leprosy, as a skin cream to lessen scars from smallpox or acne, to restore lost eye lashes, to treat chilblains and in a preparation with olive oil, honey and alum as a hair conditioner. One Danish study showed that the bones of 79% of leprosy sufferers had measurable levels of mercury and as a treatment for syphilis it survived into the 20th century.

From the 15th century mercury was also used in an amalgam with tin to 'silver' mirrors. The technique was fiercely guarded by Venetian mirror-makers – the artisans were imprisoned at night and when that didn't work the industry was moved to the island of Murano. Anyone who tried to leave or to sell the secret faced the death penalty. Other uses included mercury silvering or fire gilding; an amalgam with either silver or gold would be applied to a base metal and the mercury content removed by heating.

Right: Gilded armour made by the Royal Workshops at Greenwich, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (Photographed by Claire Houck and reproduced under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic licence)



So, why was the jar found at Baynards? By 1995 only seven find spots were known and, although that number has now increased, the great majority come from either London or Southampton. Baynards appears to be the only rural site to have produced one but the house was occupied by some important families with links to the Court based in London. The Sydneys, Uvedales, Brays and Mores all owned, and probably lived for at least part of the time at, Baynards and may well have brought a personal physician carrying mercury with them.

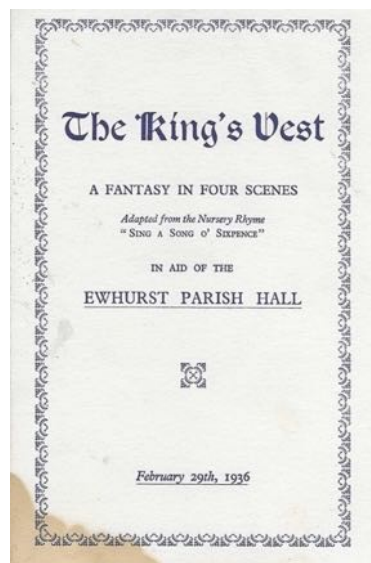
EWHURST PLAYERS EARLY YEARS

By Barrie & Marian Heathcote and Mike Fanya

The present group of Ewhurst Players celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in 2024. However, our current group is by no means the first incarnation of the Ewhurst Players. We had been advised that the group was in existence in the 1920s, maybe before. In 1928 the following report was made- *"At last week's meeting of the Women's Institute Ewhurst Village Players presented "The Sleeping Beauty" in mime, their first attempt at this sort of acting."* Certainly, the Players were around in the 1930s. In 1938 they put on Leslie Howard's *"Tell me the Truth"* and the following year *"Who are They?"*, by Cosmo Hamilton, the playwright and novelist who lived at Winton House.

Right: A programme for *"The King's Vest"* 1936.

Below: *"Who are They?"* 1939



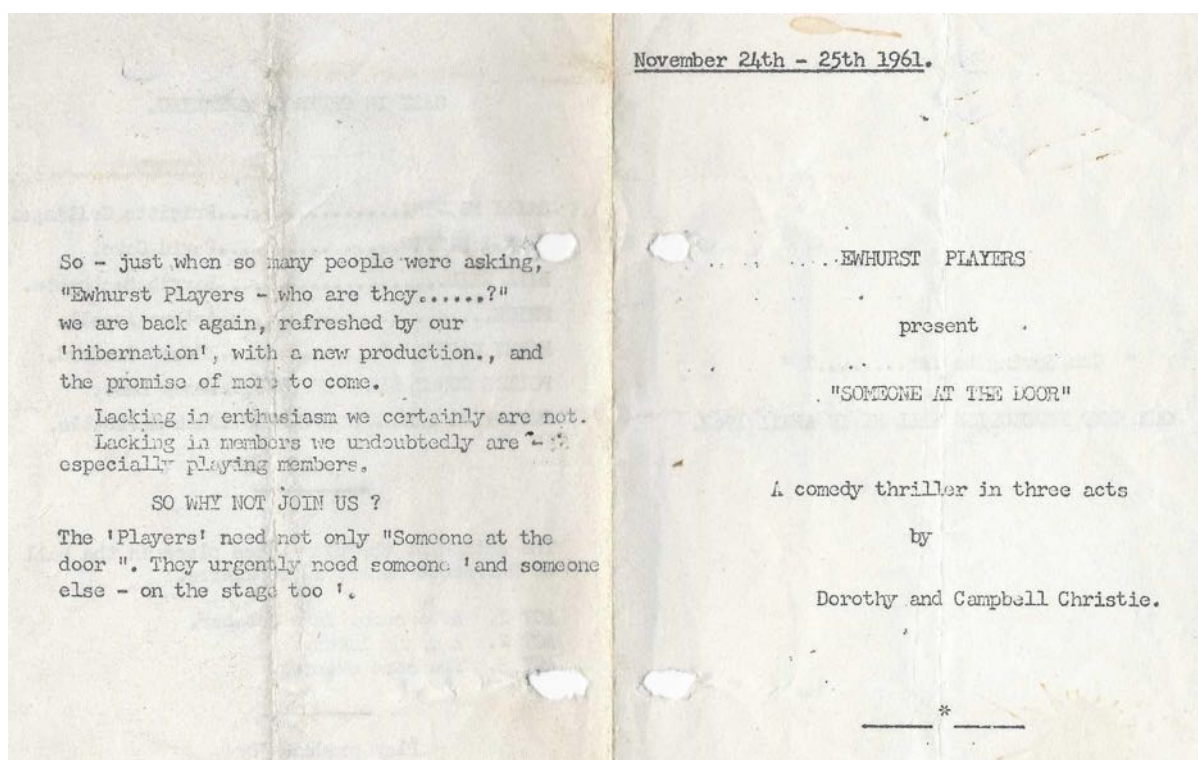
The group started up again after the war with a *"Grand Variety Bill"* in May 1946, followed by *"If Four Walls Told"* in November 1946. Several productions were put on during the 1950s including a pantomime *"Jack and the Beanstalk"* in 1957. Although *"Rumpelstiltskin"* was put on by the Ewhurst Fellowship in 1955.



In the early days of 1961, Barrie Heathcote used to meet a few friends in the Windmill pub on the way home from work. It was here that he met David Oake, an ex-professional actor who told him that they were hoping to reform the Ewhurst Players.

We started with a play called *"Someone at the Door"*. This was a comedy thriller. The production was a success, despite the justifiable newspaper criticism which stated that the note found on a drowned body was dry when it arrived on stage.

The cast were all from the local area including Henry Lade who was the local butcher. His premises were in the Street to the right of the Vets where there are now two houses, Arthur Ansell who managed the Post Office, and Teddy Barford who was working for a wallpaper manufacturer which certainly helped when it came to decorating a set. Our rehearsals were held in the back room of the Windmill Inn and we were only allowed into the Village Hall to build our sets on the weekend before the shows. The sets had to be simple and members worked late into the nights to erect and decorate them. A lot of hard work when we only performed for two nights. We performed two plays a year until the group folded in 1969.



Above: Programme for " Someone at the door" 1961

In 1973, Barrie felt that it would be good to resurrect the group and approached all the members of the earlier group but to no avail. Patience Tree, who had been involved in previous Ewhurst Players productions, then asked him to take part in a fundraiser which was held at Coneyhurst-on-the-Hill. At this event Barrie met Mike Fanya who had moved into Ewhurst Village in 1970 and was disappointed that there was not an amateur dramatic group in existence. At that time Mike was a master at Cranleigh School and was acting and directing productions at the school and had also joined Godalming Theatre Group. Mike and Barrie were keen to revive the Ewhurst Players and in those pre-email days they circulated the village with a note in the newspapers and they also put up posters announcing a meeting in the Ewhurst Cricket Pavilion for all those interested in taking part. The night of the meeting in November 1973 was murky and wet, but 17 people did turn up and a further 10 said that they were interested. By the end of the meeting, we had a committee with Mike as Chairman, Barrie as Secretary, Jerry Day as Treasurer and Victoria Helstrip and Tish Wood as committee members. We had £40 in the bank and lots of enthusiasm!

The new committee decided to stage two one - act plays in May 1974, 'Home is the Hunted' and 'The Happy Journey' by Thornton Wilder.

Right: Surrey Advertiser report
for "Home is the Hunted"



It was further decided to stage our first three-act play, *"The Happiest Days of Your Life"* in November 1974, with Mike as Director. Casting the play was something of a lottery as he had no idea about the ability of any of the actors. However, he need not have worried as once we had started rehearsals people fitted into their parts and took on their new identities. Victoria Helstrip in particular had everybody in fits of laughter with her Joyce Grenfell characterisation of Miss Gossage, the jolly-hockey-stick games mistress.

*Right: Press cutting for
"The Happiest Days of your Life" 1974*



The headmistress of St. Swithin's holds aloft proof of the luggage identity which senior master Rupert Billings had claimed was his, in a scene from Ewhurst Players production. Pictured left to right are: Victoria Helstrip, Michael Birmingham, Patricia Wood, Jerry Day and Roger Metcalf.

We were fortunate to have strong support off the stage as well. Martin Lockwood was an inventive Stage Manager, and Mike Kidd was in charge of lighting, although in 1974 there were some very primitive lighting controls! The Front of House team was headed by Mabel Edwards who was also in charge of the raffle, while the kitchen was manned by ladies who provided tea, coffee, squash and biscuits for audiences – all included in the price of the ticket.

"The Happiest Days of Your Life" was a winner. From the moment the opening bars of *"Top of the Form"* sounded, the tone was set for the evening and the audience could settle down and enjoy the warmth and nostalgia of tapioca, semolina, prep and hockey sticks. It was a play that in 2014 the Ewhurst Players chose to put on again to celebrate their fortieth anniversary.



Above: *"The Happiest Days of Your Life"* First produced in 1974 and here celebrating the 40th anniversary of the group in 2014

The only other play that the Players have reprised was *"When We Are Married"*. Originally produced in 1978 the second version, 25 years later, saw no less than seven of the original cast treading the boards again.



Above: "When We Are Married" has also been produced twice - in 1978 and 2003

Below: Backstage crew



After our success with our first productions, we decided to put on our first panto, "Mother Goose". Our director was Tish Wood and auditions were held in her house, Mulberry Court in the Ockley Road. Our pianist was Mike Hopwood who taught at the Duke of Kent school and he was joined by Roy Townend, the Glebelands' school caretaker, on the drums



Some of you may remember the time when The Surrey Advertiser was published in broadsheet form. The weekly publication contained news about general events in Surrey but each area had its own coverage with news of local interest. Kay Newnham was the reporter for The Cranleigh edition which also covered the local villages. She would attend our productions and write a review which would be published in the paper the following weekend. A photographer would come to a dress rehearsal in the Hall and a photo of the production would accompany the review.

During one early show we introduced the Ewhurst Ballet Corps (four males) which was repeated in "Mother Goose" in 1991. A report in the Surrey Advertiser stated- *"If you haven't seen the legendary Ewhurst Corp de Ballet in action then you can never call yourself a true Ewhurst Diamond Top* (The historic village name dating from the Civil War). They brought the house down with Ravel's Bolero as it has never been performed."*



The Ewhurst Ballet Corps

Acting was a challenge as the stage was so small and many scene changes would be required but we were lucky to have Martin Lockwood on board as our stage manager.

I am not sure if he volunteered or was coopted but he was soon tackling our stage problems by building an extension to the stage. This had to be taken down after every show and stored under the stage. A chore that took some considerable time but gave us the space we needed.

When, in 1974, we started to think about the set, we looked at the flats that the previous group had used. These were rough hessian nailed onto supporting timbers. A bonfire followed and new flats were made by a team who turned up on Sunday mornings to build sets. These were decorated by an excellent team of painters. To quote Martin, "Such good times we had".

We also managed to create some imaginative scenery and special effects. In "*Peter Pan*" we "flew" Wendy Davies across the stage and produced a wing flapping "roc bird" eight feet wide for "*Sinbad the Sailor*".



Right: Wendy Davies flies across the stage

Above: The huge bird with flapping wings

At that time the entrances and exits to the stage were too small to allow for larger props to be moved in and out so they all had to be lowered and raised as required from the space above the stage. On one night, not long before the first performance of our Panto "*Cinderella*", we were in the Hall until the early hours of the morning trying to perfect the manoeuvring of her coach up and down from the stage. We flew Christmas trees and beanstalks into the roof space and even a city landscape with sparkling lights.

We were also fortunate to have many talented and skilful costume seamstresses who made, borrowed, hired, and altered costumes to fit our casts. Amongst many others we had a two headed three-legged giant in "*Jack and the Beanstalk*", a cat in "*Dick Whittington*" and elegant ladies in "*The Three Angels*". Makeup artists had quite a challenge to make up characters like the cannibal king in "*Sinbad the Sailor*". I am not sure how this would be accepted in our times.

In 1974 the dressing room was divided in two with a door between but we soon demolished the wall and made a dressing room for all the cast which simplified their stage entries and exits. A full-length cupboard was added for costumes.

We had no space to store scenery and props but were given the space under the stage to help with this problem. Unfortunately, the space allocated for the scenery was occupied by a large pot-bellied coke burner which was, in the past, the only heating source for the hall. We originally thought that it was cast iron but, on attempting to break it with a sledge hammer, the hammer just bounced off. We realised that it was steel and finally cut it up with an oxy acetylene torch, an extremely dirty job.

Also, under the stage we discovered several old floodlights and spotlights but no controller. This was resolved by the use of a wooden board with a few household on/off switches and a household dimmer switch. Not ideal but it worked. This was soon replaced by an electronic panel made by one of our members which, due to a lack of earthing, gave our chairman quite a shock. The lights were operated from the top of a small scaffolding platform that had to be built at the rear of the hall.

Eventually the mezzanine floor and the control room were built at the rear of the hall and we bought a professional lighting desk. We were joined by Bob Foley, a BBC sound engineer who built a control panel for the sound and rewired the connection from the box to the stage and also installed the loudspeaker system and hearing loop that we still use.

Right from the start the Players were lucky to have Ewhurst Village Hall as their 'spiritual' home, even though when the Players started using it again it was badly in need of refurbishing and reroofing and there was no lighting or sound equipment. The building was owned by the Church of England and in 1972 they decided to sell it to the Ewhurst Parish Council. The agreed price for the hall was £4,000, which included all contents. Jumble sales were arranged, coffee mornings flourished and the Parish Council put an additional sum on the local rates. It was a united village effort and finally, in 1973, the Hall was handed over to the village. After completion of the sale a framed painting of the Surrey Hills by a well-known artist was discovered under the stage. The Church Commissioners stated they did not want the picture which was put up for auction, and profit from the sale (after auction costs) helped to offset the cost of buying the hall.

WEST SUSSEX COUNTY TIMES 4TH JULY 1975

Picture find gets £3,750 price tag

A LUCKY find means that Ewhurst parish council is likely to recover most of the £4,000 it paid for the village's old church hall.

Under the hall stage was discovered a valuable 101-year-old oil painting—a view from Pitch Hill, near the Windmill at Ewhurst.

Its existence there was not unknown, but it had often been hit by flying shuttlecocks and the glass fronting it had been smashed several times. So it was put away—and forgotten.

It is now in Gallery-33, Billingshurst, with a price of £3,750 on it. The 48in. by 30in. canvas has been



Art authority Mr. James van den Bergh points to the canvas on which so much restoration work had to be done, the flaked original paint being patiently fitted together like a jigsaw.

Mr. Bulbeck had found the painting when he and others for the parish council and George Vicat Cole in 1884, ten years after this painting was done. That was at Sothe-

Above: The picture, by George Vicat Cole

Over the years the Ewhurst Players has benefitted from families moving into the area and by the 1980s there was also a Junior Players section established.

The main group went from strength to strength and gained a reputation for quality productions, outstanding pantomimes, and musicals, ranging from "*Oliver*" and "*Annie*" to "*Oh What a Lovely War*". The Players have also put on anthologies and revues at different venues in the village, as well as venturing into community drama and performing in the Cranleigh Arts Centre. Since 1977 the Players have gained awards for a number of productions, including in 2007 '*Becket*', which gained an award and a review that stated, ".....full marks for selecting a play as challenging and demanding as *Becket*.....the decision to stage the play in the round was excellent. The play demands two strong actors in both the title role and Henry II and both parts were played with a great degree of confidence and considerable acting ability. The sheer amount of dialogue to learn for these two roles was massive!"

We continue to put on three productions each year and we hope that the Ewhurst Players will be entertaining their audiences for many years to come. It is also our wish that the enjoyment and friendship which has been at our core for 50 years will encourage anyone who is interested to come and join us.

*EDITOR'S NOTE

Unfortunately, in referring to the Ewhurst Corps de Ballet, Kay Newham describes the residents of Ewhurst as '*Diamond Tops*'. However, it should have been 'Kaffirs'. The name originates from a football match played in Victorian times, and supposedly commemorating a Civil war skirmish between the *Diamond Tops* (Roundheads) of Rudgwick and the *Kaffirs* (Cavaliers) of Ewhurst - she got it the wrong way round!

GEORGE READINGS AND EARLY BUS SERVICES IN EWHURST

By Laurie James

George Readings' father, Thomas, was in the building trade, described as a Foreman Builder or a Clerk of Works, leading something of a nomadic existence, seemingly moving around to suit the location of where the work was at the time. In 1911 the Readings family was living at 19 Cheltenham Road, Prittlewell, near Southend-on-Sea, an appropriate road name in view of later events. Tom Readings was involved with building a church in Boscombe, a department store in London, a house for a military gentleman at Ewhurst [Hurtwood House for Major General Sartorius*] and Charterhouse School, amongst other projects. Having become associated with a brickworks owner at Cranleigh, Tom Readings also obtained income from that source. His son, George, was born at Boscombe on 5 October 1892 [and in the early 1900s the family lived for a few years at Plough Farm*]. On leaving school, he became apprenticed to be a Motor Engineer and then joined up for war service with the Army Service Corps (Mechanical Transport) on the Western Front in February 1915 at the age of twenty-two. At that time, he and his father lived in Wood Green, north London.

George married a Ewhurst girl, Delia Tidy, in 1919 [possibly in the Congregational Church as the marriage is not recorded in the Parish Church registers, and a memorial service was conducted there for her brother, Oliver, who died at the Battle of Jutland*]. After demobilisation from the Forces, he set up a small business as a Motor Engineer in buildings behind the village blacksmith's premises, known as Readings Garage. Like so many of his contemporaries, who gained knowledge of motor vehicles during war service, he identified a need for a better form of mobility for local people than that offered by Job Ansell, the Ewhurst Carrier who lived at Sunnyside and ran to Guildford on Mondays and Fridays and to Horsham on Wednesdays, principally for the carriage of goods. Ansell had undertaken military service, but only joined up in the Horse Transport section of The Army Service Corps near the end of the war on 10 August 1918, aged forty-one. He was stationed at Blackheath and Bovington, before demobilisation in July 1919.



Readings apparently purchased for £200 an ex-Army Ford Model T vehicle, registered PB 7637, (which was converted to carry passengers, with eight or eleven seats as variously described. This cost him nearly all his savings including his Demobilisation Gratuity and is said to have been used on two days a week run the short distance from Ewhurst to Cranleigh. Thomas Readings did not approve of his son's ventures but did lend him some capital at times.

Left: George Readings' first bus PB 7637 with the Bulls Head behind

Readings was not the first person to run a bus from Ewhurst to Cranleigh. Frank Osbourn had moved with his family to Ewhurst Road, Cranleigh from Portsmouth by 1901. Frank Junior was a plumber and married Harriet Wyld in 1902. By 1911 he had

his own motor and general engineering and cycle dealership business at 2 High Street, Cranleigh. By about 1913, Frank Osbourn Ltd. had acquired a small bus (registered LC 5309) which ran on Tuesdays and Saturdays to Guildford from Ewhurst via Cranleigh. The *Surrey Advertiser* records that a fourteen-seat motor bus also ran a trip to take prospective buyers from Cranleigh to Burchetts Farm near Ockley on 18 May 1914, where a sale was being held. However, wartime exigencies may have resulted in its disposal, as in January 1916 it was advertised for sale, "Good running order, £100 for quick sale." Osbourn's garage also ran a taxi service, which would be summoned by comic artist William Heath Robinson on wet nights to take him from the railway station to his home on Cranleigh Common. The Osbourn firm became Agricultural Engineers, selling farm implements and machinery and the garage much later became the Cranleigh Motor Engineering Co., on the site of what is now the Little Manor Service Station.

In May 1921 Readings asked for Dorking Rural District Council's permission to extend his Cranleigh-Ewhurst service to Holmbury St. Mary via Cotton Row; this was granted. It was not long before Readings was also running from Gomshall to Ewhurst via Peaslake although, in July 1921 it was announced that the service would be withdrawn until further notice due to the state of the road. In the January 1922 edition of the *Travel by Road* timetable, six round trips are shown between Ewhurst and Cranleigh on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, with an extra one on Saturday evenings. However, the Ewhurst to Gomshall section of route seems to have been re-instated as a photograph of the fleet from about 1922 shows sign writing for a Cranleigh to Gomshall service via Ewhurst, Peaslake and Shere. By then, the trading name was Royal Blue and two more converted Ford Ts had been acquired – PC 7623 and CR 4293, the latter with a chassis extension by 'Baico' (The British-American Import Co. Ltd.), one of several suppliers of such kits for modifying the Ford Model T.



Above: George Readings' busses outside the old forge in Ewhurst (now Fire Shield) c. 1922. His first bus, PB7637, is on the far left with his two later acquisitions CR 4293 and PC 7623

The Aldershot & District Traction Co. was running a service 23 from Cranleigh to Guildford via Shamley Green, Wonersh, Bramley and Shalford but did not serve Ewhurst. At an unknown date,

probably in 1923, Readings re-organised and expanded his service so that it ran from Ewhurst to Guildford via Cranleigh, Run Common, Grafham, Birtley and Bramley, rather than following the A&D route through Wonersh, although he would now be viewed as a potential threat by the larger operator.

The trading name was changed again to Surrey Hills Motor Services. Three more Ford Ts were acquired in 1923/4 – PD 4710, PD 6054 and PD 9964. When PD 6054 was inspected by Guildford's Chief Constable on 2 October 1923, he required that two fire extinguishers be obtained, a new bell cord fitted, upholstery and windows to be repaired, door hinge screws to be replaced and the seating capacity to be painted inside the vehicle. On 17 April 1924, CR 4293 needed the doors and beading around the windows to be repaired, a bell to be fitted and the brakes adjusted, whilst two weeks later, PD 9964 needed the seats removing from in front of the rear door and a door handle fitted.

PHONE 36 Ewhurst.

G. READINGS,
Cycle and Motor Engineer,
EWHURST, SURREY.

EWHURST-CRANLEIGH BUS SERVICE
TUESDAYS THURSDAYS & SATURDAYS.

TIME TABLE.		
EWHURST depart.	CRANLEIGH STATION arrive.	CRANLEIGH STATION depart.
8.5 a.m.	8.20 a.m.	8.35 a.m.
9.10	9.25	9.35
10.10	10.45	11.5
11.35	11.50	12.0
1.10 p.m.	1.25 p.m.	1.40 p.m.
2.10	2.25	2.40
3.40	3.55	4.10
5.10	5.25	5.40
5.50	6.5	6.5
6.55	7.10	7.20
7.50	8.5	8.15

Passengers picked up or set down at any point on the journey.

*Saturdays only. Seats reserved if paid for previously

Passengers carried to Destination after reaching Garage, Ewhurst, 1/- per mile.

PARCELS CARRIED.

Car available for Private Hire. Phone up 36.
Removals by Motor Van.

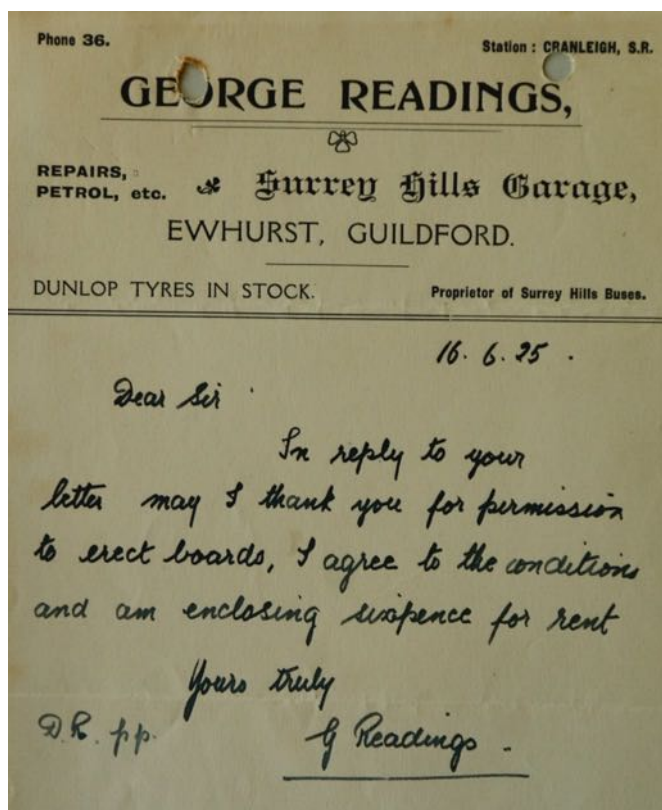
J. ALLEN, Printer, Knowle Lane, Cranleigh.

In 1924 he acquired a piece of land in the main street in Ewhurst from Walter Webb, of Malquoits, Ewhurst and built a small bus garage. In May 1924 a licence was granted by Dorking Council to allow Surrey Hills to start a service from Ewhurst to Dorking via Forest Green, Ockley, Beare Green and Holmwood. Naturally enough, this came to the attention of the all-powerful East Surrey Traction Co. who seem to have used some form of pressure on Readings to encourage him to withdraw from the Beare Green to Dorking section (covered by East Surrey service S25) from 1 October 1924.

Between March and September 1925, Readings took delivery of five twenty-seat Lancia Z-type buses, to supplement the remaining Fords. These were registered PE 1592/2102/2328/3000/5173. In March 1925, Readings applied to Guildford's Chief Constable to operate an hourly service from Ewhurst to Guildford via Peaslake, Shere, Silent Pool, Newlands Corner and Merrow.

Meanwhile, Readings sought in May 1925 to operate six journeys each way between Guildford and Horsham via Shalford, Bramley, Birtley, Grafham, Leathern Bottle P.H., Nanhurst Corner, Cranleigh, Ellens Green, Rudgwick, Clemsfold and Broadbridge Heath. Although Aldershot & District service 33 linked those termini, it took an alternative route past Alfold Crossways and through Bucks Green, rather than serving Cranleigh and Rudgwick. Readings took care to ensure that his timings did not clash with those of A&D 33. Either through refusal or for some other reason, the service did not proceed but certain journeys on the Surrey Hills Ewhurst-Guildford service were diverted at some stage at Cranleigh to run via Leathern Bottle instead of Run Common. On 14 March 1925 A&D service 23 had been extended from Cranleigh to Ewhurst, offering more competition for Readings.

It may have been retaliation in response to competitive measures from A&D that prompted Readings to apply in November 1925 for an hourly service from Shamley Green to Godalming over roads well-served by the larger operator. The route would have been via Wonersh, Bramley, Shalford, Guildford,



Peasmarsh and Farncombe. Guildford Borough Council refused this application the following month, probably for the usual reason that they considered these routes adequately served.

Left: Business letter heading

Aldershot & District regarded small competitive operators as a nuisance and by September 1925 George Readings had been approached to see whether he wished to sell his business. His initial decision was that he wished to carry on and work in co-operation with A&D, having offered his business to them for £6,000, to include services, ten buses and premises, which had been declined. The Lancia buses were valued at £350 each and A&D considered that a fair price for the whole business was £3,500-

£4,000. East Surrey Traction Co. was also keen to see Surrey Hills removed as a potential competitor so in December 1925 they approached London General and Aldershot & District with a view to purchase. The matter was successfully concluded by A&D at midnight on 15 January 1926 when they took over the remaining services, the bus garage in Ewhurst and the five Lancias. However, the name Surrey Hills Motor Services did not disappear immediately as Aldershot & District were to continue the former Readings services under that title for around five months, using their own vehicles as the Lancias were put into store at Haslemere.

With capital at his disposal, George Readings moved to Cheltenham and launched Black & White Luxury Coaches. In 30 April 1930 the company was sold on to Midland Red, for a reported £100,000. Readings then formed Blue & White Coaches Ltd., based in Chiswick, general motor garage activities, and a few coaches were used for private hire and day excursions to coastal resorts. The Blue & White venture was short-lived, ending by March 1932, but before it ceased, he acquired the garage premises of H. G. Norton & Co. Ltd. back in Cheltenham on 1 January 1931. The Blue & White company subsequently had its name changed to G. Readings Ltd. which was to be the entity for the Cheltenham activities of auto repairs and a new and second-hand car dealership.

Meanwhile, George Readings had become involved in Cheltenham local government, serving as a town councillor for twenty-seven years, being later made an Alderman and being elected Mayor of Cheltenham for 1956/7. He passed away on 9 April 1981 and is remembered locally by George Readings Way, a road in a more recently-developed area of the town.

**Information added in square brackets by editor*