Spring 2023 Issue number 9

Ewhurst History Society Journal

Welcome to the spring issue of the Ewhurst History Society Journal.

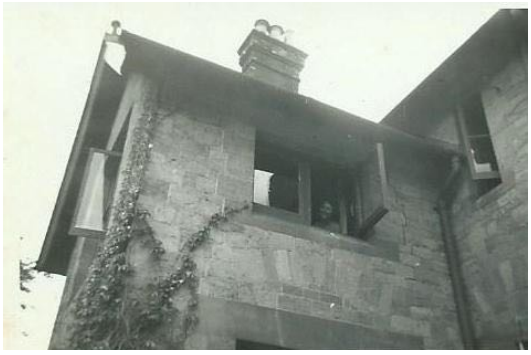
This issue contains five articles. At our Christmas Members' Evening on the subject of family history Joan Greenwood gave a presentation about her family's connection with the Belfast linen industry, which she has written up for the Journal. In January I received an email for a lady in the USA who had been an au pair at The Old Rectory in 1954. It was such a lovely memoir that I asked her if I could publish it in the Journal. Sue Willis has written about the Royal Philanthropic School at Redhill, now a RNIB residential college, where her daughter lives. Nigel's article is about some unusual Ewhurst postcards in his collection and the story behind them. And finally, I have finished off with a note on two recent visitors to Ewhurst from Japan and Australia.

We will be publishing the next edition in August/September 2023. 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

MEMORIES OF THE OLD RECTORY IN 1954

by Eva Heins

My maiden name was Eva Urbanek and I was an au pair at the Old Rectory in Ewhurst from November 1953 to December 1954. I am originally from Salzburg, Austria. Even though I had English in school I realized it would be beneficial for me to improve my English by actually having to use it. When my father found out that one of his friend's daughters was leaving an au pair position in England, it was arranged that I should take her place. I was lucky to come to a place like the Old Rectory in Ewhurst.



Above: Eva in the garden of The Old Rectory, and right: looking out of a window.

Seeing this big house for the first time it seemed hard to believe that just the three of us were occupying this huge place. The Rector, Mr. Dollar, and his wife Cora, took me under their wings and treated me almost like family. Mrs. Squires, who came every day to help, and Mr. Potter, the gardener, all could not have been nicer. Traudl, my predecessor, was able to stay another week before she returned to Austria and she introduced me to some of her friends in the village. I also made friends with the other au pairs in the area. I used to visit at the Allens, who had a German nanny for their two boys. Also, I went to the home of someone who used to be, I believe, the Captain of the Queen's Yacht. They had a Swiss nanny I was friendly with.

I soon settled in and enrolled at the extension of Cambridge University in Guildford. There, I also joined the International Club. Mrs. Dollar helped me with my studies and also took me to some of her favourite clothing stores in Guildford, where she introduced me as her young friend from Austria. When the Dollars were invited by friends for Christmas Dinner, they took me with them. They also took me on vacation with them. One of my main duties was to take Brownie, the spaniel, on a walk every day in the lovely countryside around Ewhurst. After a stressful job in Austria, this all seemed like a vacation to me and I extended my stay from the original 6 month to almost 13 months.

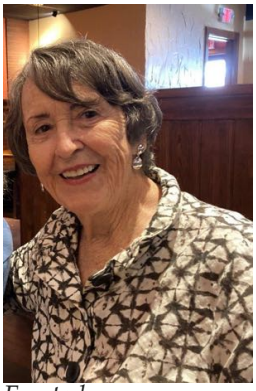
There are so many memories - like the milk maids, daughters of the local dairy, delivering the unpasteurized milk to the house. We scooped up the cream on top for the porridge. The old AGA stove never went out as long as Mr. Potter fed coal to the boiler named "glow worm". Going to the chicken farm and coming back with eggs with double yolks. I don't know what they fed these chickens to produce twin yolks in eggs. The chicken farmer used to be a member of the Maltese Knights. I remember the wife of the village policeman inviting me in for elderberry wine. Everybody was kind and nice to me. Mrs. Squires took me on a hike over the hills and dales to Guildford. She also took me to a Pantomime in Brighton. I had no idea what a Pantomime was, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I remember going to a dance in a different village and the crowd going wild over a Dixie Land band. Also, it was new to me that everybody rushed out to the nearest pubs to get a last drink at a certain time!

The Old Rectory in 1954.

What I did not expect was how cold it could get in England. I thought the snowy Alps were as cold as it gets. I was wrong, the damp cold in England was worse. The Old Rectory was especially cold. There were radiators, but only in the hallways. I was told to leave my door open and let the heat come in from the hall. I think there was still a WWII mentality about coal shortage. I was always cold. Mr. Potter, the gardener, was always looking out for me. He found an old fender, polished it and brought me some coal for my room and showed me how make a fire. What a relief!

But I was still apprehensive in this old house with so many unused rooms and all kind of strange noises. A friend lent me a copy of "Dracula". I had not heard of it before. As I was reading, it struck me that it was dealing with the same scary surroundings as my own: a cemetery and a church. I became very uneasy. Mrs. Dollar always reminded me to take my "torch" when I was expected to come home late. One late evening I had forgotten to take my torch. When I got off the bus from Guildford, I took the shortcut through the cemetery. I almost fainted when I saw this dark figure near the wooden gate by the hedge. Thank God it was only the friendly village policeman making his rounds. Nearing the big house, I worried that no one might be home. There was this big brass gong in the entry hallway. I hit it with all my might and yelled "yoo hoo, is anyone home". The master was in his study and all was safe. Mrs. Dollar always took her bath late. When I got home late, she always expected me to come in and sit by the bathtub and tell her about my day. This time I told her about the book and how scared I was, and that if I did not get over it, I might have to leave and go back home. She said she knew the cure for my problem. She asked me to bring her the book and then took it away from me. Actually, I was relieved and stayed on to have many happy memories!

Before I left Ewhurst to go back to Austria, there was talk about a new rectory going to be built. I believe there was only one more au pair, after me to assist the Rector and his wife.



Eva today.

After I returned to Salzburg, I took a job at the American Consulate. A co-worker there asked me to go out with her and her boyfriend, who brought another friend along. That blind date became my husband. We were married in Salzburg and I soon left my beloved Austria to live with my husband at his home in Charleston, South Carolina. Charleston is a lovely old city by the sea and I was lucky to be welcomed into his family and made many good friends here. My dear husband is now deceased and I am 89. Although I went back to Europe many times, I never made it back to England, but I have many fond memories of my time in Ewhurst and the people I met there.

THE ROYAL PHILANTHROPIC SOCIETY FARM SCHOOL FOR THE REFORMATION OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS, REDHILL

By Sue Willis

Some of you will know my daughter Pipyn who, as a partially sighted child, attended a wonderful school in Exeter - 'The West of England School for Children with Little or No Sight'. She was there until the age of 20 at which time we had to search for somewhere nearer to home and were lucky enough to secure a place at the RNIB college in Redhill, situated in Philanthropic Road - a name which caught my attention from a research point of view!

In 2015 the RNIB were planning a big reshuffle of their site in Redhill with the campus being demolished and rebuilt to accommodate not only the blind and partially sighted residents, but also new houses, the sale of which would help support the RNIB. Unfortunately, the planned construction took six years rather than the two we had hoped for, with our children temporarily housed in Leatherhead, Epsom and Ashtead. But now the site is finished, all 77 homes for public purchase are sold, and the new accommodation for the RNIB residents is wonderful and well worth the wait. Pip and all her friends are very happy!

One building from the old site has survived. Known as Tudor House, it was once home to the chaplain in charge of the Royal Philanthropic School.

Charles Dickens described Tudor House as '*a pleasant rustic house by the hillside with roses shining in the hot sun, around its windows! Through a flower garden we come to the door; and keeping out the dog, obtain admittance to the dwelling of the chaplain. While we wait in the drawing room, the dog, who has coursed round the house, plunging among the roses, makes a triumphant entry through the open window and looks at us for applause'*. Dickens was interested in social reform, reflected in the characters and moral themes in his novels and he believed in the role of the state to *'send boats to those who would be drowned'*. 'The Philanthropic School in Red Hill for Reform of Boys' was a place he was keen to visit and to find out how young boys could be transformed into law-abiding citizens.

The Philanthropic Society was founded in 1788, working with vagrant children in St. George's-in-the-Fields, London, but with the expansion of the railway they were able to move out to Redhill in 1849. Prince Albert laid the foundation stone and the school consisted of a chapel, dormitories, workshops and a small farm of roughly 130 acres (later expanded to 350 acres) where the boys, aged 10 to 18 could learn practical skills. Some of the younger boys had been sentenced to transportation but recommended by prison governors as being 'fit to be kindly taught than hastily punished'. The work of the Farm School, as it was referred to locally, was that of curing boys who had already entered a life of criminal activity.

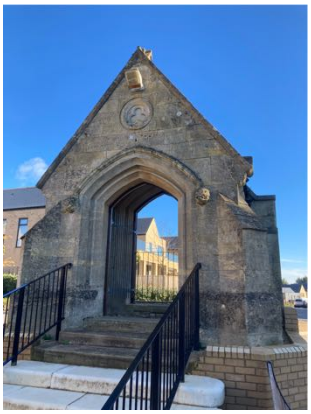
They were given responsibilities and trusted as if they were on parole, there were no bars or walls to restrict them and as well as the farm there was a forge, a carpenters' shop, a dairy, cowsheds and piggeries. They could learn tailoring, shoemaking and gardening. By 1852 the number of boys had increased from 40 to 120 and a new house to accommodate 80 boys was completed.

At the 1852 summer harvest a number of neighbours assembled to watch the presentation of small rewards and prizes which the farm manager felt were deserved, and their presence showed *'their satisfaction with the general order and regulation of the school and the conduct of its inmates'*. Charles Dickens noted that *'four out of five boys are rescued by the Royal Philanthropic School. The fifth very often takes advantage of the unwalled grounds and unbarred windows to escape. Those who escape are invariably re-taken. The other four boys do well and live as honest men'*.

From about 1973 the school failed to make any profit. Reform Schools had become Approved Schools, inspected by the Home Office and a 1969 Act of Parliament changed Approved Schools into Community Homes which now housed boys placed under care orders with the supervision of Social Workers. Increased staffing was necessary which contributed to the demise of the school and it closed in 1982.

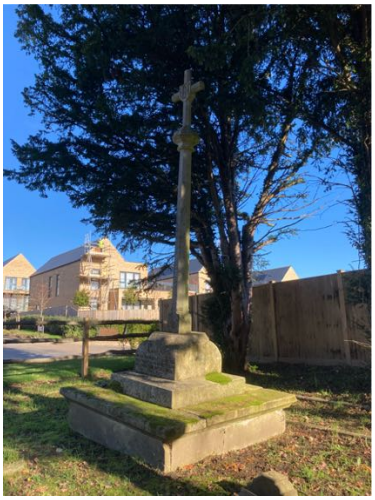
In 1988 the extensive but run-down site was bought by the RNIB for residential accommodation and now, in 2023, many of the residents from SeeAbility's Swail House in Epsom are together on one campus, with the renovated Tudor House providing a central point with conference rooms and a communal area for the new community, all overseen by SeeAbility and known as Redhill Supported Living at Royal Hill Park.

If you visit the site today you will find the original chapel porch has been saved and stands alone amongst the modern flats and houses - the chapel itself was bombed in 1944 and demolished in 1988. Opposite the porch is a small burial ground containing many of the staff from the school and some interesting and still legible inscriptions.



The surviving porch.

Above: The chapel.



Right: The cemetery.

Below: some of the cemetery inscriptions.

SPREADERS, PORTERS AND DOFFERS; MY FAMILY IN THE BELFAST LINEN MILLS

Joan Greenwood

My maternal great grandfather, John Hutchinson, was born in Kilmarnock in Scotland in 1857 and died in 1946. He came to Northern Ireland and married Jane Wallace who came from County Antrim. They subsequently went on to have seven children born between 1882 and 1895 – Mary; my grandfather Henry; William; Jane; Ruth; John; and Margaret Caroline. My mother's family (probably influenced by my grandmother) felt that they were a rough lot who drank and smoked and who were mill workers and therefore very much beneath them.

At the time of the 1901 census all nine Hutchinsons were living in north Belfast near the notorious Shankill Road. They had moved from the countryside to the city in order to find work for their large family in the prosperous linen mills for which Northern Ireland was famous. Their 'second class' terraced house had three rooms but no bathroom or toilet: they probably had a chemical closet in the back yard. In the census all of them, apart from the baby Margaret Caroline, were literate. John is described as being a gardener; Mary aged 19 was a 'spreader'; Henry aged 17 and William aged 15 were 'porters' and Jane aged 12 was a 'doffer' – all four working in the linen industry. The three youngest children were all at school.

Linen fibres are produced in the stems of the flax plant which at that time grew profusely in the damp conditions of Northern Ireland. The process of turning flax into linen took place in two buildings – the mill where the fibres were refined and spun and the factory where the spun threads were woven into cloth.

Once the flax was harvested the stems would be placed in huge water tanks or in streams and the rough material would be 'retted' - allowed to rot down leaving only the usable fibres. These would then be collected, cleaned, sorted and graded in the 'Hackling' shop and tied into long, blonde, silky hanks rather like a 'flaxen' haired girl's pony tail. The hanks were then sent to the 'Spreaders' or 'Rovers' of which Mary was one. Linen fibres are very sensitive to becoming dry so the children, girls and women worked in bare feet in water above their ankles. They also breathed flax dust into their lungs. It's not surprising that tuberculosis and rheumatic diseases were endemic. However, the wages were higher than a child could hope to achieve in domestic or agricultural work so parents were always very anxious to have their children employed in the mill – sometimes even falsifying birth certificates to make the child look older than their actual years.

After Mary received the hanks she passed the flax fibres through a series of machines which produced, from the loose fibres, a ribbon of even weight. This ribbon was further elongated into long threads or 'rovings' which were then twisted and wound loosely onto bobbins to be transported to the Spinning room. This work was fairly skilled so Mary was paid 30 shillings a fortnight.

Henry and William were Porters. As the name implies, their job was to transport goods from one stage of the process to the next – Hackling shop to the spreaders and rovers; rovings to the spinners and weavers. It didn't require great skill but it did need stamina and strength. For this work they were paid 27 shillings a fortnight.

In the spinning room the rovings were spun into yarn ready for weaving. The room was vast with two rows of frames extending the full length of the room with a passage down the middle. Jane was a 'Doffer', working under the instruction of a Doffing mistress. By 1901 the legal age for working had been raised from 8 to 12 and the child was only allowed to work part time – alternate days at work and

school so some education continued for at least another year. But the education offered was very poor as the teachers saw little point in educating children who were destined for mill work.

The rovings received from the Spreader or Rover were placed on the spinning frames and fed through a trough of hot water to keep the fibres moist. The doffing mistress walked up and down the passage checking to see when the bobbins needed to be replaced. When she spotted one that needed to be 'doffed', she blew on her whistle. Shouting was useless since the racket caused by the flying bobbins rendered all speech impossible. The young Doffers were each assigned an area to work in. So if the whistle was blown in her patch, Jane came running to perform her task of removing the full bobbin and replacing it with an empty one. Speed and agility was of the essence. Half time doffers were paid 2 shillings a day for girls and 1 shilling and 6 pence a day for boys. Full time doffers were paid 25 shillings a fortnight for girls and 20 shillings a fortnight for boys. As far as I know this is the only situation in which females were paid more than males – possibly because the girls were faster and nimbler at changing the bobbins.

The spun yarn was taken into the factory weaving sheds where it was transformed into the beautiful damask for which Ireland became famous.

By the time of the 1911 census the family had moved to better accommodation at 50 Blyth Street and only the two youngest girls were still living at home. Margaret Caroline aged 15 was a Stitcher, finishing the cloth and making it into table cloths and bed linen, while Ruth aged 20 was now a Box Folder packaging the linen for despatch to the retailers. Working in the Factory was considered more prestigious than working in the Mill so they were 'doing better' than their older siblings!

In 1911 Henry (my grandfather) had risen from Porter to Warehouseman. He was never very strong or ambitious but he was blessed with good looks which swayed my grandmother Rachel Ferguson to fall in love with him and marry him even though her family thought she was marrying beneath her. However, what Henry lacked in drive was easily balanced by Rachel's huge ambition for her family and determination that none of her eight children would be mill workers. To achieve this she needed money so every morning, before school, her eldest child, my Uncle John, would cycle to the Factory to collect a large bundle of ready bleached linen fabric. During the day, while the youngest played and the older ones were at school, she sat at her Singer Sewing machine transforming the fabric into top quality sheets, pillow cases and table cloths – the same work as her sister-in-law Margaret Caroline was doing in the factory. After school, John took the finished products back to the factory ready to be packed. When Henry died in 1925, Rachel no longer had his wages, but this piece work and a little confectionary shop which she opened, paid sufficiently for her to ensure that all eight of her children had either higher education, apprenticeships or learnt skills which would prove useful in their adult lives. They were a musical family – all played a musical instrument and they formed a family choir which was much in demand.

That's not quite the end of our association with the mills. My father, David Stephen, also came from a poor but aspirational family. Before he married my mother, Rachel's daughter Lily Hutchinson, he was the chief accountant at a mill where Lily was Personal Assistant to the Mill owner. After they married, they moved to England where my father trained for the Church of England ministry. After working in Deptford he became Rector of St Nicholas, Alfold. In the 1960s a relative, who was a salesman for Courtaulds which had taken over most of the Irish linen industry, stayed with us when he was selling to Harrods etc. in London. He often gave my mother off-cuts which my sister and I would turn into trendy outfits. So, in our own way, we also benefitted from the linen industry!

ANNIE PRESSLAND - POSTCARDS OF EWHURST

By Nigel Balchin

I have long extolled the virtues of postcard collecting in the context of local history. Our knowledge and understanding of the past is certainly enhanced by the images captured by early postcard publishers. However, alongside photographic postcards there are what are termed "artist cards". Whilst these are, for the most part, useful as historical records one has to be wary of the potential for artistic licence. I wonder how many of you would quickly identify this scene [below left] in Ewhurst? Whilst the building is depicted quite accurately, the addition of a garden gate and a profusion of flowers, (not to mention the omission of the war memorial), serve to disguise the true location, as does the lack of a helpful caption. It is, of course, The Old Post Office (formerly the Bulls Head) on the Mount!

In the autumn of 2007 Janet and I had the opportunity to examine an archive of postcards and photographs belonging to a woman whose family had lived at Wykehurst Farm. She brought them to us herself and some happy hours were spent poring over the albums, which form a unique and complete picture of life on a Surrey farm in the 1920s.

Tucked in amongst the collection were two uncaptioned artist cards published by J. Salmon of Sevenoaks. Having initially put them to one side as typical 'chocolate-box' pictures of little relevance, in favour of the more interesting photographic material, the appearance of a photographic postcard of the farmhouse showing the same view caused a degree of excitement.

It soon became apparent that we had stumbled upon some previously unknown postcards of Ewhurst. The two cards in question (numbered 2808 & 2809) depicted Wykehurst Farm, a late 16th century smoke bay house (previously known as Wickhurst Farm).

Left and above: The uncaptioned picture postcards of a cottage with a flower filled garden.

Below A photographic postcard showing a more mundane row of bean poles. From the position of windows and chimneys and the timber framing it is quite clearly the same house.

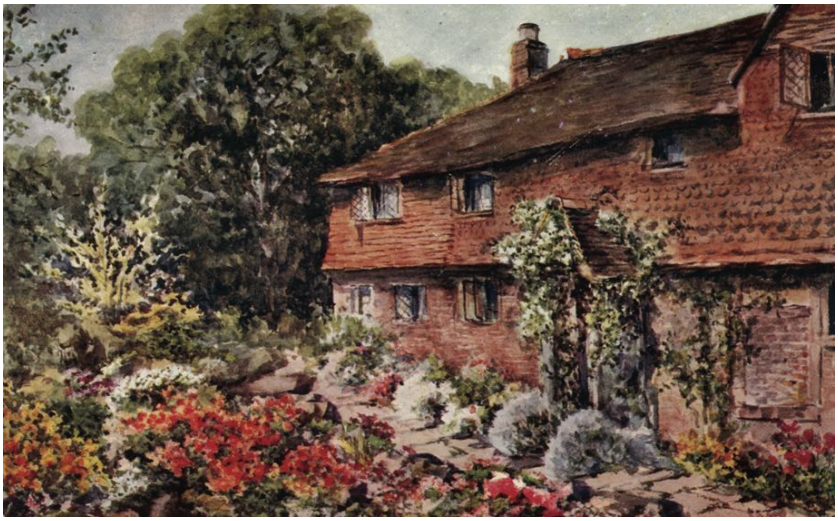
Not knowing anything about artist cards in general, or Salmon in particular, I got in touch with the Salmon Postcard Study Group. They were very helpful, explaining that the cards I had were part of a set of six, and that the artist was Annie Pressland, a fact I could confirm from the signature on one of the cards. They also confirmed that all the locations were previously unknown.

The Salmon Postcard Study Group were able to send me copies of 2810 and 2811, and I found 2806 on eBay. Sight of the missing 2807 would have wait until the Surrey Postcard Club Fair in late November of that year.

The onus now was on trying to identify the various locations. 2810 was identified as the Old Post Office (See picture on page 8). 2806 was identified as High Edser, a 16th century house for which, unfortunately, we do not have any contemporary postcards, and 2807 and 2811 were identified, with the help of a sketch provided by the Domestic Building Research Group (DBRG – a voluntary group with an interest in Surrey's timber framed buildings), as two views of Rapsley.

With the exception of the Old Post Office, which lies next to Ewhurst church in the heart of the village, all the houses featured on the cards lie in the vicinity of Shere Road and Coneyhurst Lane. Whilst Annie's portrayal of the buildings' appearance seems very accurate, certainly as regards the visible timber framing etc, she does appear to have taken a considerable amount of artistic licence with regard to their surroundings as all of them feature a profusion of flowers.

Two views of Rapsley, both for the rear of the house looking north and south respectively.



Left: High Edser

Annie Louisa Pressland was a watercolour painter of flowers, gardens and still life subjects in a full-bodied and distinctive style. She was born in Brighton in 1862, where her father was a linen draper and silk mercer. Annie trained at the Slade School of Art and exhibited between 1892 and 1923 at the Society of Women Artists, the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, the London Salon, and galleries in Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester. In the 1920s, after her father's death, she moved to Streatham to live with her stepmother (her father's third wife), Winnie. This somewhat demanding relationship restricted Annie's work and exhibiting opportunities for a number of years. She resumed her artistic career on the death of her stepmother in 1926, when she moved back to Sussex to enjoy her painting and artistic life. Much of her time was occupied in travelling around the country painting private gardens. Interestingly, Lady Lucy Hume-Williams, who lived at Rapsley, was also a member of the Society of Women Artists. It is possible that they were friends and that Annie was staying at Rapsley whilst painting the houses in Ewhurst. Annie died in 1933.

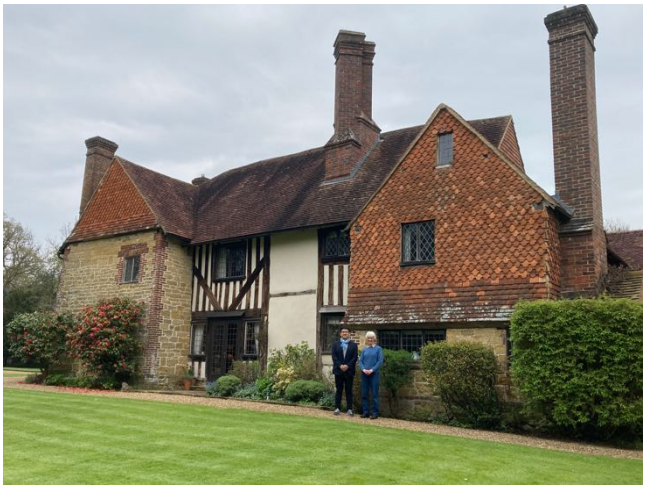
This article is based on an article I had published in Picture Postcard Monthly magazine in August 2009.

VISITORS FROM ABROAD

By Janet Balchin

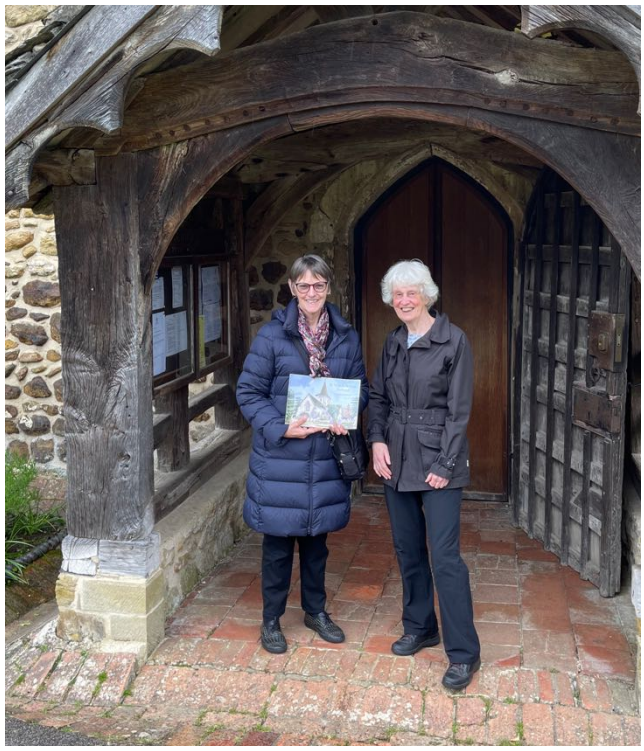
Via the History Society website, we receive emails from all over the country and abroad. Sometimes people want to visit and we try to meet up with them if possible. We have recently had visitors from Japan and Australia.

Mostly these enquiries relate to family history when people trace their ancestors to Ewhurst, but our visitor from Japan had a very different interest. Tomoki Takeda is a lecturer at the Department of Political Studies at Daito Bunka University in Tokyo. His interest was in Anglo Japanese relations during the early years of the Second World War. You may wonder, what on earth has this to do with Ewhurst. You may be even more surprised to find that the Japanese Ambassador, Mamoru Shigemitsu, was living in Ewhurst in 1940/1, as were some of his staff. The reason they came to Ewhurst is that they knew Major General Piggott who lived at Rapsley. Major General Piggott spoke fluent Japanese, having grown up in Tokyo where his father had been a legal advisor to Prince Ito, and then spending much of his own career in Japan as a military attaché. We were able to take Tomoki to meet the owners of Coneyhurst, where Shigemitsu stayed and Marylands where his military attaché, Tatsumi, stayed as well as Rapsley.



Right: Janet with Tomoki at Coneyhurst

In May Janet was able to meet up with Denise Newton, from Australia at Ewhurst church. Denise's 4x Grandmother Jane Roberts (neé Longhurst) was baptised at Ewhurst church on 23 March 1783. In July 1801 she stood trial at the Surrey Assizes and sentenced to be transported to Australia. Sadly, her crime is unknown, but people were often transported for quite trivial crimes. She arrived in NSW in 1803 and married another convict, William Roberts, who became very wealthy after his sentence was served. After he died, Jane continued his business and property interests and was quite a mover and shaker in colonial Sydney - rather unusual for a woman at the time!



Janet with Denise at Ewhurst church