

Times Past

Storrington & District Museum
Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow

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CURATOR'S CORNER

THE COLLEGE

I wonder how many present-day Storrington residents are aware that for sixty years Storrington was the home of a military College?

The College was founded in 1871 by the then Rector, the Rev. George Faithfull, who came to Storrington in 1871. He had previously held the livings of Horsemonden, Kent and Llanwenarth, nr. Abergavenny [Monmouthshire]. Having previously been involved with similar establishments he promptly rented out the Rectory, along with several other buildings including those known as "The Castle" [largely now demolished], as a Cramming School providing "private education for boys of fourteen years of age and upwards".

According to a very informative article in *The Worthing Herald* of 23rd May 1931 "the College was founded when examinations first took place of the purchase of Commissions in the Army". [The Prospectus also refers to "the Navy and various Public Services and for ... University Entrance Examinations"]. In the early days there were as many as 80 pupils, many of whom brought along their horses and grooms and they had their own pack of Beagles.

According to a former pupil the College "stood alone... Faithfull had an extraordinary knowledge of the mind of youngsters [and the College] was the most unique collection of rather high-class boys to be found anywhere. [...] There was a ... good sort of inn [the *White Horse*] where we used to play billiards and indulge in mild drinks"

The *Worthing Herald* article lists a number of former pupils including a Duke [Portland] and a large number of Guards officers and other distinguished military gentlemen.

The College experienced something of a hiatus in 1895 when a large proportion of the pupils were drawn into service in the Boer War and the then principal, Major W F Austin, also went off to fight. Following his return to Storrington he was joined by Mr W A Fuller M.A. in 1908. Mr Fuller was a distinguished academic and correspondent and he led the College to new heights until the Great War claimed many of his pupils. Tragically he was killed in a collision between his motorcycle and a lorry near Polegate. His wife carried on with the assistance of Mr Gerard Smith who had been senior tutor for a number of years prior to Mr Fuller's untimely death. A Chapel was dedicated in 1918 [believed to have been in what is now Castle Bungalows]. When the College closed the furnishings were transferred to Chichester Cathedral.

Although the College had originally been founded to prepare boys for the Army, demand for this type of education was diminishing and many of the pupils were now going on to University. Following Mr Smith's sudden death the College struggled on for a few more years but eventually closed in 1931 when Mrs Fuller retired.

There is no space here to include the many amusing details contained in the Prospectus and other documents in the Museum collections. These may be the subject of a further article at a later date.

Helen Whittle

EDITOR'S EXHORTATION

Steve Holbrook is researching the life of Colonel Ravenscroft and would be grateful for any information. Contact him at 8 Plantation Way, Storrington – 01903 742451

COPY FOR THE NEXT ISSUE BY MID-JANUARY

Flight Lieutenant C. R. Davis, DFC

Storrington's Battle of Britain Fighter Pilot

Carl Raymond Davis was born in 1911 in South Africa of American parents. He held a U.S. passport but gained a love of this country when he came over at the age of thirteen to attend Sherborne School and Trinity College, Cambridge. After this he returned to North America to qualify as a mining engineer at McGill University but was back in England by 1935 whereupon he joined the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

On 29th April, 1939, he married Katharine Anne Hope, the sister of Group Captain Sir Archibald Hope, a fellow pilot with 601 Squadron. The 601 'County of London' Squadron flew from RAF Tangmere. The banns were called at Storrington Church on the three preceding Sundays. Their son, Carl Michael, (known as 'Mike'), was baptized at Storrington on 19th July, 1940. They were living, with other members of the family, at a house in Hurston Lane. Their home, Fryern House, had been commandeered for use by the Canadian Army. It was a stately home now demolished, but which is commemorated by Fryern Road and other place names.

Flight Lieutenant Carl Raymond Davis shot down ten enemy aircraft and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross but he himself was shot down and killed on 6th September, 1940, at the age of 29. His ashes were buried in Storrington Churchyard on 13th September. A traditional gravestone (not a War Graves Commission tablet) marks the site, less than thirty yards north west of the Church.

During the Battle of Britain, the English Summer of 1940, saw in the skies the fighters of the RAF pitted against the fighters and bombers of Germany's *Luftwaffe* – the German Air Force. The RAF – after a long and bloody struggle, –defeated the *Luftwaffe* in this crucial battle with heavy losses on both sides. Consequently, Britain was able to fight on until the principal military collapse of the Axis (the alliance of fascist countries) in 1945.

South Eastern England contains numerous airfields ('stations') the personnel of which guarded, armed, maintained, controlled and flew the fighter aircraft – the RAF's Hurricanes and Spitfires – during the battle. These stations have since taken on the same kind of legendary significance as that invested in *Agin-court*, a battle remembered by Shakespeare in his play 'Henry V'; names such as Biggin Hill, Hawkinge, Manston and Tangmere to name just a few, are sure to remain forever in our country's memory.

Flight Lieutenant Davis flew from Tangmere in 11 Group of Fighter Command, of which 601 Squadron was part. On the 6th September of 1940 he was flying Hurricane serial number P3363, Squadron Code UF-W. He was shot down following combat with a large number of Messerschmidt Bf 109's that were escorting bombers intending to attack 11 Group Sector stations. (Because of their heavy losses in August, the *Luftwaffe's* tactics now involved sending comparatively small numbers of bombers with massive fighter escorts.)

The Order of Battle (for what came to be known, as the 'Battle for Britain' then, subsequently, the 'Battle of Britain') for 7th September, 1940, confirms that on [the previous day] "*601 Squadron were flying Hurricanes out of Tangmere. Friday, 6th September, was a tough day. The RAF lost 23 fighters with twelve pilots saved but German losses were 35 aircraft*".

Although the enemy attacks on 6th September, 1940, were largely broken up, 601 Squadron suffered heavy losses with four aircraft shot down, including that flown by Flight Lieutenant Davis. Hurricane UF-W crashed at Matfield, near Tunbridge Wells, Kent, at approximately 09.30 hours. Photographic evidence indicates that it landed "inverted and on fire". Some of the aircraft's wreckage is displayed at Hawkinge Battle of Britain Museum in Kent. Flight Lieutenant Davis' name is honoured too at Tangmere Military Aviation Museum near Chichester.

The Village's Battle of Britain Commemoration Service that marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Battle was attended by Mr & Mrs Mike Davis and Baronet Hope. Mike Davis, during refreshments after the Service in the Old School, met, again, with The Rev. Acheson, Jeremy Carter and Steve Holbrook all of whom had helped to research his father's story. Also attending the Service and Refreshments was a now elderly eyewitness to the fatal crash at Matfield in Kent.

This fighter pilot's story featured, too, in Storrington's Millennium Exhibition in late August and early September.

A new Roll of Honour for the Fallen of World War II was unveiled by Mike Davis in St. Mary's Church on Remembrance Sunday, 12th November, 2000.

“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”

Winston Spencer Churchill, September 1940.



Flight Lieutenant Davis in a blast shelter made of brick, sandbags and turf near the runway ready for 'scramble'. He is wearing a 'Mae West' inflatable life-jacket.

Photograph reproduced by kind permission of After the Battle Publications.

Text by Steve Holbrook.

A. F. Bell – “The Sullington Shepherd”

Our request, in the last issue of “Times Past”, for information on both A. F. Bell and Francis Thompson, produced instant responses. Mrs. K. Bramham told us that Arthur Bell was a predecessor of hers at “The Studio”, Manley's Hill, and that Bell's poems were collected by Miss Reed in a book called “Sussex Verse”. If any member has a copy and would like to donate it to the Museum, our Curator, Helen Whittle, would be most grateful.

Mrs. Morgan of Washington remembers learning some of Bell's poems while a pupil at the ‘Old School’. She feels that, though pleasant and easily understood, they are not to be compared with Thompson's works. Bell was able to travel, she recalls, only in an invalid chair or by pony and trap, due to a childhood accident.

Bell was born in 1875 and died in 1918. His body lies next to that of Father Tyrrell, his great friend, in a remote corner of the Parish Churchyard. Also there lies Miss Maud Petre, of Mulberry House, friend and supporter of both men. Father Tyrrell will be the subject of an article in a future ‘Times Past’.

From Dr. Sally White, Principal Curator of Worthing Museum and Art Gallery, come details of an exhibition held in the Gallery in 1994, of paintings by the American artist R. H. Ives Gammell, inspired by Thompson's poem “The Hound of Heaven”. This was written while Thompson was recovering from drug addiction at Storrington Priory. The Exhibition was seen widely in both England and the USA.

E. P. Beaumont.

FRIENDS' NEWS

The Winter lecture programme started on October 12th when Annabelle Hughes gave a fascinating talk on Amberley Castle. What was particularly interesting was her thorough debunking of the various myths surrounding this picturesque and romantic building, which is not really a castle at all. It was originally an ecclesiastical manor house used by the Bishops of Chichester, one of whom - William Rede - had the walls built around it in 1377 after obtaining a licence to crenellate from the King.

But why were the walls put up? According to Annabelle, as a display of power and social status since a close examination of the walls reveals their serious deficiencies as fortifications and they would have repelled no-one for very long. So all I had read as a schoolboy, and naively believed ever since, has no historical basis in fact - the walls had not been erected to keep out revolting peasants (the Peasants' Revolt did not take place until 1381) and the idea of marauding French pirates coming such a long way up the Arun is, to say the least, a little far-fetched. But it made for a good story. Nevertheless, I would still like to think it was something more than a bishop's vanity which caused these splendid walls to be built!

This is where I stick my neck out and will undoubtedly fall foul of the experts! I believe the good bishop had another perfectly good reason for sealing off his manor house from the world outside - a terrible fear of the plague. Cyclical outbreaks of plague became a common occurrence during the

14th and 15th centuries, starting in England in 1348-49 with the infamous 'Black Death' which killed a third of the population. The death rates among the clergy were even higher at around 40 to 45 per cent. Further epidemics occurred in 1360-2, 1368-9 and 1375 so it must have been a matter of serious concern for everybody at the time. Bishop Rede must have seen the advantage of spending more time at his isolated manor house at Amberley, but to create a physical barrier to protect those inside would be infinitely superior.

Nevertheless, the Bishop was still a vain man! This can be ascertained very simply from the scale of his enterprise: why else build magnificent walls at over 40 feet in height, when something a little more modest (and a great deal less expensive) would have adequately served the purpose of excluding undesirables? Certainly it was not seriously intended to serve any military function - the towers at the corners are all 'internal' which means they could not provide flanking fire along the curtain walls. So Bishop Rede was still very keen to prove his social status, at a time when such concerns were becoming increasingly important. But it was obviously a great bonus to him that his walls also served a very practical purpose; it is difficult to imagine the terror which must have gripped the nation when so many people were dying from disease. As Asa Briggs has said: "It was an episode of exceptional catastrophe".

SOME DATES FOR THE DIARY ... Christmas Lecture: this year the Christmas Lecture takes place on **Thursday, 14th December** when well known Sussex historian Chris Hare will be talking on "*The Sanctuary at Washington - Communists and Mystics*". We're going to have a present stall at this event and we would like to appeal to our members for any unwanted presents or suitable items which can be sold on the night. Please contact Gina on 01903 892210 or bring them along for the evening.

Christmas Meal: we are having a Christmas Meal at the Anchor in Storrington on **Thursday, 21st December**. The cost is £13.95, including coffee - this is a non profit making event. Any member who would like to come, or see the menu, should contact Gina on the number above.

AND FINALLY ... Books: we are trying to raise funds by selling second-hand books on a number of related subjects - archaeology, Sussex, folklore, crafts, local history, antiques etc. There is now a stall at our meetings and we hope to have them available soon in the museum. If you have anything suitable, then please bring them along, or if you have several, telephone Gina and she will be happy to collect them.

The Curator is appealing for a home for the museum library and archive collection. The museum room at the Old School is too small to store this material which is an important educational resource for the local community. In particular, we would like to find a room somewhere (ie a back room in a shop or a disused office) where this material can be safely stored and accessed fairly easily. Please contact Helen on 01903 740197 if you are able to help or have any suggestions.