



HISTORY SOCIETY

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Memories of a Shamley Green
Boyhood ~ part 1
Frank Huntley

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PREFACE

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The Shamley Green History Society has now been in existence for four years and a considerable amount of research by members is taking place. This booklet, the first of our publications, has been written by Frank Huntley who was born and brought up in the village. It gives a fascinating insight into rural life fifty years ago and our Society is very grateful to him for his contribution.

We expect to publish further booklets from time to time and there will be more reminiscences from Frank Huntley.

Rosemary Derby (Chairman)

February 1987

CHILDHOOD AT SHAMLEY GREEN

by

Frank Huntley

I was born on Thursday, December 9th 1915, early in the morning at 7.30. Snow was in the air and Sagittarius was rising over the horizon. My father, I am told, had to ride a horse from Woodlands to call Dr. Graham from Wonersh who drove out in a pony and trap to attend my delivery. The midwife, my brother reminds me, was called Franks and she was in all probability the "nurse" and "sick visitor" mentioned in the Cokeler archives. She lived at Lordshill, and how on earth she made the journey over the distance to Woodlands, I don't know.

My parents lived at Woodlands Cottage, Woodhill. It was (and still is) a pretty cottage tacked on to the upper end of Woodhill Farm. The front garden ran slightly downhill towards the lane, and was fronted by a bargate stone wall which retained it, for it's level was but a few inches from the rounded stones at the top. At the end of the wall nearest the farm was the one and only "squeeze opening" I have so far seen in Surrey. From the front porch, the brick paved path ran straight down towards it ending in two or three steps which gave on to a sunken platform with brick sides, and out from which one could only squeeze between the two curved pieces of weathered oak built into the face of the wall in such a way as to give enough room for one foot at a time at the base, yet gradually widening towards the top.

Such squeeze openings are common enough in the Dales and West Country, where their primary purpose is to keep cattle within enclosures, and at the same time, give egress and ingress to the farmer. To my very great surprise, the squeeze was replaced by a conventional hanging gate a few years back. Ah well, I suppose a time came when the little squeeze became inconvenient and a nuisance - or even more likely, extremely costly to replace.

We have a photograph which just shows it. My mother, all in Sunday finery, is sitting on the porch steps with me in long fussy clothes on her knee, whilst my brother Henry strikes a six or seven year old's pose at the side. He had just recovered from scarlet fever and was wearing a new suit with an Eton collar and long black stockings - as a treat.

He looks pretty fed up in fact, and having asked him, he says he was! Eight weeks previously he had been sent to Farnham Isolation Hospital, as 'the scarlet' was then a notifiable complaint and something 'nice' children did not get. He says he went in a horse-drawn vehicle which he calls a carriage. It was driven by a coachman named Bowbrick

who, if I remember rightly, was also in private service at a large residence on the opposite side of the village from the Woodhill Estates, and but a short distance from Lords Hill. During the isolation period, Henry grew out of all his clothes, hence the ensemble which looks to be made of typical 'pepper and salt' tweed of some kind. The trousers appear to be gathered just below the knee, and would without doubt, have chafed the backs of his legs unmercifully which probably caused the necessity for the long black stockings.

The photograph was taken by a Mr. Sayers who was the village shoemaker and general 'do-all' man. It was sent out to India where my father was serving with the Queen's Surrey Regiment on the North-West Frontier. Much later, after his return, the photograph somehow by-passed Henry and came to me. Incidentally, Mr. Sayers is mentioned in the 1898 Parish Magazines which I have.



Photograph showing the infant Frank with his mother and brother. The 'squeeze opening' is just visible in the foreground.

The Woodhill/Woodlands complex, about a mile along Woodhill Lane up towards Farley Heath, consisted of what I choose to call two "Proper Residences" - Woodhill and Woodlands, and it incorporated Woodhill Farm, our cottage, the spacious farm enclave with a large threshing barn, and three other cottages further up the lane, the

last of which, Upper Woodhill, is still there with it's own small group of outbuildings, and which is still occupied by Mrs. Chandler and her son. The two lower cottages have gone and only the faintest signs of the occupied site remain. They were dilapidated before the last war and were already disintegrating when a bomb fell in the nearby orchard in 1940 or 1941. They were a pair of artisan cottages of considerable age with timbering, as I remember, which would be described today as: "A Pair of Period Cottages Ripe for Conversion".

Woodhill, down the lane from us, was owned by a retired Rear-Admiral named Sparkes. It is of Georgian proportions if not all Georgian throughout, with a pillared entrance portico and to one side a conservatory in which grew camellias and other exotica such as streptocarpus, and another highly scented wall plant with rosettes of pale pink wax-like flowers, the name of which always eludes me just when I need it. The house had an 'in-and-out' gravel drive, and from it's frontage there were level lawns which reached to the retaining wall by the road. Across the road, which was at a lower level, were two oblong ornamental ponds divided by a causeway, and which were banked on the further side by enormous clumps of bluish-pink rhododendrons. From the house the whole effect was exactly that provided by the deliberate use of a ha-ha.

The causeway dividing the ponds led through to a sweep of quite natural pasture full of buttercups and ox-eye daisies in the spring and summer, and in the centre of which were tennis courts. Here too, was an aluminii conifer in which I saw my first-ever goldcrest whilst at play one day with Patrick Nesbitt, whose family had then acquired the property. The lower pond discharged through a boundary wall into a waterfall-pit by the side of the little branch lane which led tortuously to Stroud Common. The waterfall was overhung by an enormous beech tree flanked by mixed shrubbery.

Of late the House, Outbuildings and eleven acres have just been sold in excess of one hundred thousand pounds.

All in all, really very little of the topography has changed in sixty years - it is just the way of life which is different, for there is much more of an intermingling of residents in common interests than ever there was which, in the long run, should bring integration to a village community in the broadest sense, and become a focal point for all.

So, in my childhood, Woodhill Farm, part of the Admiral's Woodhill Estate, was then in a 'Happy Families' occupancy - to wit Mr. Field the Farmer, no less. They had a daughter called Nita slightly older than I was; and a cousin who, after the First War, invented and patented a board game of an aerobatic nature called 'Plane-O', or something similar, which made him a fortune.

Our little cottage was also part of the Woodhill Estate, but was let off to Neil Gossage, J.P., who owned Woodlands, the smaller of the two 'Proper Residences'. It was situated a little way off the Farley Heath road along an even smaller road which, after the Woodlands drive on the left-hand side, eventually led to Smarkham and Madgehole. At Smarkham Cottage, the road stopped as such, but a right-angled turn gave on to a broad hard trackway leading to Madgehole. But at the junction of the narrow road and the trackway, an age-old footpath went straight ahead leading through the switchback fields to the Hurtwood, via Pit House.

Pit House consisted of an isolated group of a cottage and various outbuildings sited right on the Hurtwood edge by the side of an old worked-out Sandpit. A Miss Hart lived there, and a Mr. Greatorex, whom she later married. One night Pit House suffered a disastrous fire which gutted it, and afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Greatorex lived in a caravan sited just off Farley Heath between what used to be the keeper's cottage and the area of the Roman out-station.

Mrs. Greatorex was a lady devoted to good intentions and she was one of the prime movers in establishing a small Church at Farley Green, as well as sponsoring the building of a small school for the gypsy children right up on the Hurtwood itself. It was of timber construction raised in a natural clearing just off the Hurtwood road and, for a time, was operative. The orderliness of school, however, was something the gypsies could not grasp and to Mrs. Greatorex's sorrow, the scheme failed to be viable and the building fell into disuse to await demolition. I only remember one boy from the Roberts family who gained any lasting benefit. He did eventually leave the clan and settled somewhere further afield in regular employment either on a farm or as a garden-boy, I think.

We were not encouraged to go near the gypsy encampment, but I remember one day, whilst wandering in a deeper part of the Hurtwood than usual, I did come in sight of it. A rough and ready collection of dwellings made with wooden poles, hurdles, pieces of sacking and tarpaulin, corrugated iron and salvaged timber, all probably acquired from the 'rag-and-bone' trade, the usual gypsy livelihood. There were perhaps some twenty regulars of this particular clan, eking out a meagre existence amidst carts, push-barrows, skewbald ponies, cats and dogs, lines of washing, wood piles, brushwood for besoms, old iron and scrap. Annie Roberts was a periodic caller at every house, large and small, with whitewood pegs for sale, baskets made from withies, wild daffodils, hurts in season, the wild strawberries, rabbits and hares.

At Woodlands, my father was head gardener from the early 1900s for nearly fifty years - a long time to be with the same patch of soil. He and my mother, with Henry as an infant, came to Shamley Green from Milford, where they had met at a house called Wildcroft. Father went there as gardener and Mother was then a lady's maid at the

same establishment. They were married at Witley Church, and their very first home was at Mayfield Cottages, Milford, where my brother Henry was born in 1909. Shortly afterwards they moved to Shamley Green and Woodlands. In the village their first home was in rooms with a family named 'Hill', who were wood merchants, so my brother tells me. The Hills lived in one of the row of houses situated between The Bricklayer's Arms and The Malt House.

Grandfather Hill ('Sooty') was a veteran survivor of the famous forced march from Kabul to Kandahar under Lord Roberts. In the 1920s, all those years later, the Hon. W.B. Loyd of Upper House, took up Sooty's entitlement to the special medal or bar struck for this achievement, and in due course the award was ratified and made, Sooty and his family were very proud of his place in history.

From these rooms my parents moved to one of a pair of small cottages a short distance up the track by Tanyard Farm, only a few hundred yards along Woodhill Lane from the Green. They are no longer there and I have but the sketchiest memory of them bowered in orchard trees. A family named Phelps had the second one, and they had a son called Fred (Freddie), and it was he who broke our old "spinning woman of Bruges" pottery.

Further along the lane after the twisting double bends starting at Tanyard, were another pair of dwellings known as Hillyfield Cottages, and these also were part of the Woodhill Estate. The occupants in my infancy were the Faulkeners and the Childs. Mr. Faulkener, I remember, had a harelip. By the time I left the village, both of these families had gone, and the only successors who come to mind, were the Smewings, a childless couple from the Marlow-on-Thames area. Before John Syms's father bought and occupied Madgehole, the Smewings had been in his employ I think.

Harold St. George Syms was a Solicitor who travelled to and from London every day, or nearly every day. He would motor from Madgehole to Guildford for the morning train, and by the time I was going to school daily in Guildford, I would often be given a lift as I was walking down the road for the 'bus. He would take me all the way into town where I would alight at Quarry Street and I have very nostalgic memories of those rides in M05693 which was, I think, an open Standard two-seater. We would talk about what I might do on leaving school, and when the time came it was he who introduced me to Crowe, Bates & Weekes of Guildford, where I first became caught, hook line and sinker, on auctioneering and antiques. That career has given me enormous job satisfaction for the whole of my working life, and I am indebted to John Syms' father and his memory in consequence.

After the Hillyfield group, the next complex of cottages was that known as Reelhall. Anyone who can remember these whilst they were still part of the Wbodhill

property will recall how typical they then were of group habitation. Before the first conversion, as well as the existing driveway, a tiny footpath led across the roadside meadow and emerged into Woodhill Lane exactly opposite the sunken track we knew as Dibden Lane - or Deepdene - Dibdab - depending how one felt at the time. With certainty I can say that in the 1920s, the wild musk which grew in the Reelhall stream, still had an all-pervading scent. A family of Hooks lived there, also Mr. and Mrs. Broomfield. Mr. Broomfield was a small wizened man who was head gardener to Admiral Sparkes. When the Estate was sold, the Hooks moved to Rowly out on the Cranleigh road, and are still there. Mr. Broomfield and his wife moved into Stroud Lane.

The small mansion of Woodhill, situated on the left beyond Reelhall, brings us nearly to the end of the habitation. Visually the main house is little changed, although after the Nesbitts and the Strologos, the property was farmed and extensive alterations were made to the stabling and outbuildings. One thing I remember from the Strologo ownership was the small stone 'lighthouse' which was built at the side of the upper gate, and which was topped by a revolving light. In the darkness the luminosity was clearly visible for some distance. The structure has now been removed.

Lastly came the Woodhill Farm and Woodlands grouping, after which the lane twisted and turned and rose gently through the valley towards Upper Woodhill passing, on the way, the pair of 'new' cottages which the Gossages had built and into one of which we moved in the mid 1920s. Beyond Upper Woodhill, the ascent steepened as the lane climbed towards Farley Heath. Near the top, on the left-hand side, was the sand-pit worked by Grandfather Jarrad. There was once a never-to-be-forgotten day when a fall of sand completely buried him. Luckily, a young Jarrad was there as well and he scraped the victim free down as far as the shoulders, and came running for help down to my father. He in turn fetched Mr. Gossage, who drove up to the pit and between them all Mr. Jarrad was freed and driven straight to the doctor. I am right, I think, in saying that it took more than a fall of sand to down one of that hardy family. Beyond the sandpit, the lane levelled out and gave on to the heathland of my childhood. It was (and is still) beautiful, with bracken, pine, sweet chestnut, thorn, holly, birch and juniper. Charcoal burners worked there - hence Kilnhanger which was built in the late 1920s and commands a lovely view down the whole length of the valley. I can just remember the smoking kilns from the walks my mother would sometimes make of an afternoon.

When we moved into the new cottages, my father constructed a zig-zag set of steps down the high bank to the lane, but there was also a wide gate and a rough driveway a little further up the lane. It is now flanked by mature conifers which my father planned. My parents spent the remainder of their Shamley Green life there

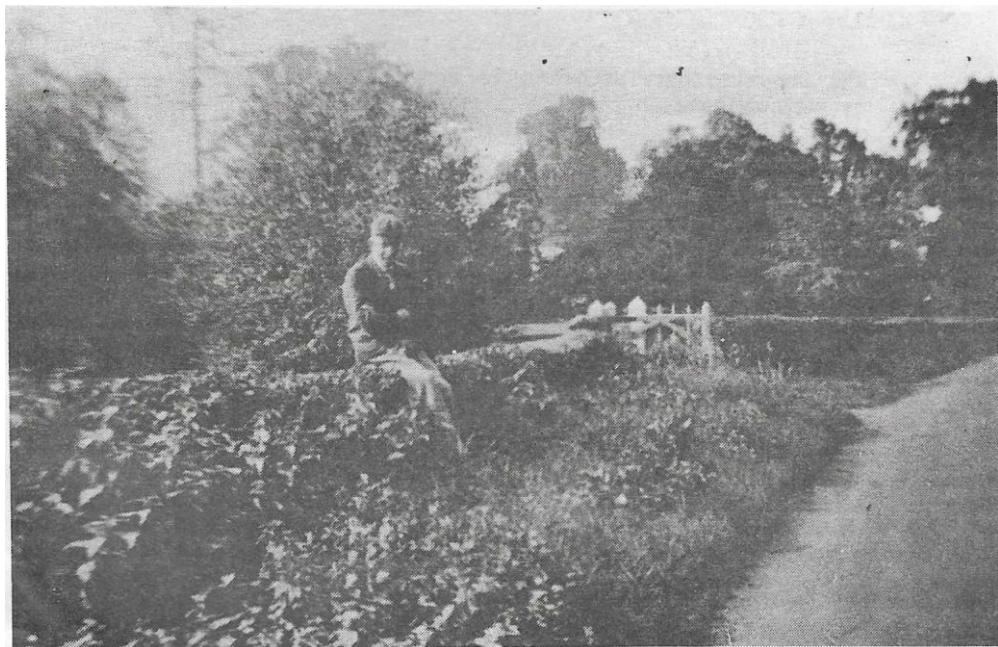
until my father retired in 1946. He died in the summer of 1950 and Neil Gossage, already a widower, died a year or two later.

The cottages were either bequeathed or offered to the then staff, whilst Woodlands was sold by Fred Gossage, who was by then married and living at Rudgwick. The Seccombes bought it and were the occupants until some five years ago, and now it has another owner, Michael Dunn, so it stands a chance of having had but three owners in a century.

The pretty pair of barns immediately fronting our old cottage were, in my infancy, both open-ended, with a switchback pathway between, leading to the higher doors giving on to the granaries. On the corner of the lane leading to Woodlands and Smarkham stood a stunted hollow tree. In it, one of our hens would often lay a clutch of eggs up in the forks of the branches, but I don't remember anyone ever seeing her bring the chicks down.

When one is asked about early memories, the border-line approaching what is but hearsay can sometimes become indistinct, but I do have three which, from their factual content have always had an impact of the real thing. Here they are:-

- (1) Laying supine on a broad lap, not my mother's, having been washed. The warmth and sight of the red fire in the small kitchen range are with me still. The lap (this knowledge of course came later), belonged to Sarah, the buxom, elderly spinster cook at Woodlands.
- (2) Being held up to the high back bedroom window to view a Zeppelin as it floated away over the tops of the pine trees beyond the farm.
- (3) Remembering my father's homecoming from the Great War on November 11th, 1919, when I was but three years and eleven months old. I think Dad had walked from Guildford and Mrs. Gossage had put out coloured bunting across the lane. She is also reputed to have said: "Oh, the beast! He's arrived before we are ready....." It is difficult enough now to time an arrival from halfway across the world, let alone what it must have been like for a demobbed Tommy in 1919.



Frank, aged about 13 and wearing his Grammar School cap, on the wall at the upper of the two Woodhill ponds.

SHAMLEY GREEN HISTORY SOCIETY

The initiative for founding the Society came from Mrs. Edna Thompson of Apples Trees, Guildford Road and the first meeting was held at Northcote Farm, the home of Mr. & Mrs. Tony Vaughan, in December 1982. •At this meeting, Matthew Alexander, Curator of the Guildford Museum, gave his ideas on the way a local history society might be organised.

The first official meeting was held in February 1983 and some 40 members were enrolled, with Mrs. Thompson as Chairman. Since then a regular programme of events has been arranged, including three very successful 'Open Evenings' when the Society welcomed members and non-members at the Arbuthnot Hall.

Visits to local houses, walks and talks have been arranged and members are researching into houses, shops, families, old maps, photographs, postcards and census returns of the 19th century and anything likely to add to our knowledge of Shamley Green.

The annual subscription is £2 and new members would be very welcome.

Chairman: Mrs. Rosemary Derby, Haldish Farm.

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Secretary: Vacant