

Wye Historical Society



Photo of hop growing at Spring Grove Farm courtesy of Elizabeth Amos

Newsletter August 2023

SOCIETY MATTERS

Executive Committee

It was announced at the AGM on Wednesday 1 March 2023 that WHS Chair, Tim Betts, would stand down on 5 April 2023 owing to other commitments. Professor Graham Bradley also retired at that meeting. The Executive Committee is very grateful for the substantial contributions that both members have made, especially through the difficulties of the Covid period.

At the Executive Committee meeting on 3 May 2023 longstanding Wye resident and WHS member Alan Paterson was co-opted on to the Executive Committee and appointed Acting Chair until his role can be confirmed by a vote of members at the next AGM on 2 March 2024. Dr David Perkins, Head of Research (Art and Humanities) at the King's School, Canterbury, was also co-opted on to the Executive Committee.

The current members of the Executive Committee are:-

Alan Paterson	Acting Chair
Jonathan Timms	Secretary
Anna Clark	Treasurer
Maureen de Saxe	Archivist
Rosie Fletcher	Programme Secretary
Ellie Morris	Website Manager
Priscilla Deeks	
Margaret Bray	
David Perkins	

Wye Historical Society Programme 2023 – 24

Wed 4 Oct 2023	“Rene Mouchotte: French Spitfire Pilot” by Jan Leeming
Wed 1 Nov 2023	“The Luttrell Psalter” by Imogen Corrigan
Wed 2 Dec 2023	“Perfume in the Bible” by Charles Sell
Wed 3 Jan 2024	Members’ Evening
Wed 7 Feb 2024	“Ashford’s Worst Day: the Great Raid of 24 March 1943” by Ed Adams
Wed 6 Mar 2024	“Sir Winston Churchill” by Paul Robbins
Wed 3 Apr 2024	“KCC Archives with some local items” by Elizabeth Finn

WHS would welcome information about and memories of PLUTO (Pipelines Under The Ocean) that fed fuel to Allied Forces in Southern England and France during WW2. Part of this vital network ran from a depot in Wye.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Wye Historical Society

Held at 7.15pm on Wednesday 1 March 2023

At the Lady Joanna Thornhill School, Wye

The AGM was attended by 43 members and 5 visitors. Members were welcomed by the President, the Reverend John Makey, who explained that Tim Betts was standing down as Chair because of other commitments. As no nominations had been received, Tim had agreed to continue as Acting Chair until the last meeting of the season on 5 April 2023. The President then handed over the conduct of the meeting to the Acting Chair.

1. Apologies for Absence. Apologies have been received from Paul Burnham, Anna Clark Anne Findlay, Sally Leaver and Ellie Morris.

2. The Minutes of the last AGM held on Wednesday 2 March 2022 were approved.
(Proposed by Margaret Bray, Seconded by Cilla Deeks)

3. Matters arising from the Minutes. There were no matters arising.

4. The Secretary's Annual Report. Noted.

5. The Hon Treasurer's Report and Financial Statement. Approved
(Proposed by Jonathan Timms, Seconded by Rosie Fletcher)

6. Election of Officers

The Reverend John Makey, Honorary President of the Society, continues in office. No other nominations having been received:

Anna Clark was re-elected as Treasurer to serve for a further year.

(Proposed by Maureen de Saxe and Seconded by Ellie Morris).

Jonathan Timms was re-elected as Secretary to serve for a further year.

(Proposed by Margaret Bray and Seconded by Rosie Fletcher).

7. Election of the Executive Committee.

Maureen de Saxe continues in office for a further year.

No other nominations having been received:

Cilla Deeks was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Tim Betts and Seconded by Rosie Fletcher).

Rosie Fletcher was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Anna Clark and Seconded by Maureen de Saxe).

Ellie Morris was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Jonathan Timms and Seconded by Margaret Bray).

Margaret Bray was re-elected to serve for a further two years.

(Proposed by Graham Bradley and Seconded by Ellie Morris).

8. Any Other Business at the discretion of the Chair. There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.25pm and was followed by "The Museum at Quex House: An Illustrated Talk" by Hazel Basford.

Collecting memories of hopping will be part of an ongoing project to assemble the social history of hop farming in the neighbourhood. If you have memories of hopping in Wye and the surrounding area, we would love to hear from you.

Hop Stories

By Margaret Bray

At the talk by Sue Duckworth on “Hopping in Kent” (2 November 2022), several Society members spoke about their own experiences of Hopping in Wye and other areas of Kent. We have invited them to contribute their stories for this article. Most of our contributors, including Mike Lepper, Michael Curtis, Jill Wilson, and David Harper provide their memories of going hopping as children with their parents and grandparents, while Alan Paterson talks about his friend, the late Charles Amos, who grew hops at his Spring Grove Farm.

In the early to mid-twentieth century Wye was surrounded by hop fields. This may be difficult to envisage now with so many changes to land use around the village. During the hop harvesting season the place must have bustled with local and visiting hop pickers. The hop fields included both those that were commercial and the hop gardens of Wye College for research, although to prevent spread of plant disease the College experimental hop fields were out of bounds to all but members of the hop department.



A local family hopping in the Brook/Wye area, early twentieth century.
Photo courtesy of Victor Jefferies c/o Graham Bradley

Mike Lepper: Reflections on Hopping

Mike Lepper was born in Wye and often went to the Wye Hop Gardens. Here Mike describes his memories. In particular, he recalls going hopping with his grandfather who was Village Sergeant and on retirement acted as Tally Man in the hop gardens.

“I was born in 1941 and my sister in 1935 and we can both recall going with our mother to the hop gardens. The hop garden we used to pick in was where the Free School playing field is now. This garden used to be reserved for mainly local villagers and I seem to remember that a small section of one of the alleys was where the children used to pick but mainly play. My mother used to pick hops every year to make a bit of ‘pin money’ to put aside for our summer holiday, which we used to take in a small cabin/caravan on Whitstable beach near the harbour. I can still remember the taste of the hot cocoa we had with our picnic in the hop garden every lunchtime, it was special.

“My grandfather, Sergeant Robert [Bob] Shilling, was in the Kent police force and moved to Wye from Chatham in 1924/25 as village sergeant. They lived in one of the police houses opposite the then Taylors Garage, now Twysden Court. My mother was only around fourteen and used to watch my father, Sid Lepper, serving petrol while she did her homework. This led to them marrying in 1932 and they lived in the village for the rest of their lives, Dad having been born in the village. In those days policemen were required to retire at 50. One of the jobs my grandfather took on when he retired was as tally man in the hop gardens. His main job was to measure the hops out of the hessian bins that the pickers picked into, using a wicker bushel basket, and then tip the hops into the large sacks for hauling off to the drying kilns. This is, I understand, where the term ‘Tally man’ came from as the pickers would be given a ‘Tally’ for each bushel picked and they would cash in their ‘tallies’ at the end of the day’s work. I used to go round with him and can recall arguments that would occur if one of the pickers felt he had shaken the hops down into the basket or struck the hops off the top a bit too high, as of course the pickers were paid on volume. Sometimes this would result in him having to empty the basket into the bin and start again. He also used to keep an eye on the areas that were being picked as, when the pickers pulled the bines, they frequently left a clump of hops on the top wire, often the largest and best hops as they were up in the sunlight. He had a long pole which I assume had a knife/hook fixed to the end and grandfather would go round cutting these hops down. When walking round he used to also pull bines for some of his favourite pickers, as quite an effort was required to get the bine to the ground.

“I have attached a photo of grandfather in his Sergeant’s uniform and also one of him with one of the pickers in the hop garden with other pickers in the background. It is

interesting to note the various seats around, none provided - if you wanted to sit down to pick it was a matter of bringing your own.”



Top left: Sergeant Robert [Bob] Shilling, grandfather of Mike Lepper. Top right: Bob with hop pickers in Wye Hop Garden. Photos courtesy of Mike Lepper

Jill Wilson: Watching the Hoppers go by

Jill recalls the hop pickers who came to collect hops from fields located in the area of Wye which is now Jarman’s Fields and Wye Juniors’ Football Club playing field.

“We moved up the road to Cherry Gardens in autumn 1946 when I was nearly 8 years old - it was not a very busy lane then. What I remember about the hop pickers is the excitement, hearing lots of noise and looking out the window at a busy stream of people, all shapes and sizes, children and grown-ups, walking purposefully by, talking away, carrying all sorts of things, baskets, bags, saucepans, some pushing laden prams. Apparently they had come off the train - it was earlier in the morning than school time - and some of them returned in the same busy stream in the late afternoon. Some stayed in huts on the Coulter’s field end of the hop garden - perhaps the sheds at the other end of the (now sports field) hop garden are remnants of their sheds. There would be fires for cooking. We used to go up the lane and walk along the path, peering through the hedge and over the gates to get a view of what went on in there - strings of hops, big baskets, busy men and women - glimpses of another world for us!”



Families hopping in Wye. Photo courtesy of Wye Historical Society



Hop pickers huts in Wye. Photo courtesy of Wye Historical Society

Michael Curtis: Hopping in the School Holidays

Michael Curtis was born in Somerset and moved to Wye in October 1946 with his family to the home of his grandmother, Amy Pennell at 7 Church Street. Michael and Mike Lepper went to school together at Lady Joanna Thornhill and have been friends ever since. Michael says “We went from Cider County to Beer County”. Here are his recollections of Hop picking in Wye.

“My Gran and Mother both went Hop picking at Wye College Farm Hop Gardens. One of these Gardens is currently the Wye Junior Football Team Playing Field and the others were at Silks Farm.

“The school summer holidays in Kent were longer to allow children to go hop picking with their families. I personally did not really like it. Your hands went black and smelt of sulphur and were difficult to get clean. When it rained water ran down the back of your neck. My Mother and Grandmother, however, loved it.

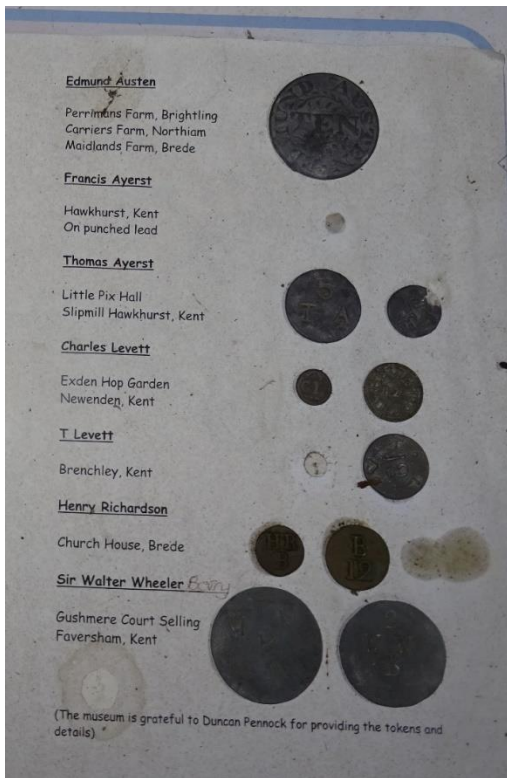
“My Mother and Grandmother shared a Hop Bin which was divided into two parts. We would start at 7.30 am and finish about 5.30 p.m. There were calls in the Hop Gardens to start picking but I cannot remember what that call was. To finish the call was “pull no more”, which meant not pulling any more bines down. I suppose you kept picking the bine you had until it was all picked. All this was piece work - you got paid for what you picked. The Tally Man would come along and empty the bin with a bushel basket and record how many baskets of hops you had picked. These hops were then put into large bags called hop pockets and taken to the hop kiln by tractor and trailer for drying. The College Farm kiln was near where the Wooden Spoon Factory is now, on Amage Road.

“Hop Gardens were rows and rows of poles and wirework with alleys in between. The hop bines were trained to grow up binder twine up to the wire work at the top. When you were hop picking you worked your way along the alley pulling the bines down as you went, picking all the hops.”



Hoppers often collected the hops into a hop bin (above left). The Tally Man would then empty the hops into 5-gallon bushel baskets and use the tally stick (see below) to record how many baskets of hops had been picked. The hops were then put into larger bags called hop pockets (above right) and taken to the hop kiln for drying.

Photo courtesy of Brook Agricultural Museum



Photos courtesy of Brook Agricultural Museum

The hop picker was paid by bushel (5 gallons) using either tally sticks (above right) or tokens (left). At the start of the day the tallyman handed out one half of a tally stick to the picker and kept the other half. For each bushel of hops collected the picker presented his tally stick half to the tallyman and a notch was made across both halves, so both picker and tallyman had a record of the number of bushels collected. At the end of the day the number of notches were counted, and payment made in tokens exchangeable for real money at the end of the harvest. The notches on both halves of the stick had to match for payment to be made, so cheating was impossible. The tokens (originally made from lead) were individual to each grower and could often be used locally as money. Originally tokens were the value of the regal coin, but later the value represented the number of hop bushels collected.

Alan Paterson: Remembering Charles Amos, Hop Farmer

Alan shares memories of his friend Charles Amos who grew hops on land which is now owned by Palmstead Nurseries.

“In his twenties, Charles Amos found himself the majority shareholder in Spring Grove Farm, by no means a large farm but with the majority good hop-growing brick earth on the Stour flood plain (land now owned by Palmstead Nurseries). He had the bad luck to own the holding at a time when two major changes resulted in his giving up hop growing then selling up altogether. The first change was the arrival of freeze-dried hop pellets which meant that a brewery could eliminate spoilage by storing and carrying forward one year’s surplus for use indefinitely. This reduced both the value of each year’s crop

and the demand for hops as a whole. But demand was further reduced when the brewing industry and the licensed trade, through extensive marketing, persuaded the public that continental-style pressurized, sterile lager was the new, trendy drink with the implication that traditional beers were old-fashioned. Lager appeals to brewers in that it needs fewer hops than traditional beer (though it needs significant investment in pressurised equipment and storage facilities) and is significantly more profitable. To a landlord, traditional beer - a living product with a limited storage life - is difficult to keep in perfect condition (particularly in hot weather), so has the disadvantage of 'going off', when it can only be thrown away. You also had to 'clean your pipes', a tedious and time-consuming chore, unnecessary with lager which will keep indefinitely.

"Hop plants grow as 'bines' up rough string suspended from high wiring supported by wooden hop poles. The actual hops or 'cones' are the flowers of the female plant. The crop is harvested by the whole bine and string being cut down and taken to a shed, where the hops are picked mechanically. Before he gave up the hop enterprise, I well remember Charles' concern over the state of maintenance of his ageing picking machine before each harvest, then the hours he had to put in on the first floor of the heated oast house, drying the crop and gravity feeding it into a series of huge hessian sacks or 'hop pockets', for later collection and sale.

"By the 1970s small hop farmers were going out of business. Spring Grove Farm had previously thrived, supporting not only Charles and his growing family but also his younger brother and family, his elderly grandfather in a nursing home and his widowed mother, so times became very hard. Charles was forced to make difficult decisions and his salvation was a government scheme which assisted farmers to diversify into tourism. His oast block became six flats and a later owner converted a Kent barn to three cottages. But he found the change from being a farmer to a holiday landlord difficult to accept and sold up at the earliest opportunity, retiring very young to the Lake District.

"I know that Charles enjoyed a good relationship with the Wye College Hop Department, which bred new varieties still extensively used in the brewing industry.

"Charles, who died aged 60, was a great friend and I will never forget our many conversations in the Kings Head as he agonised over the decisions he was forced to make to end the tradition of hop growing, later farming itself, at Spring Grove Farm which had been in the Amos family for at least three generations."

David Harper: Hopping in West Kent

David Harper was born in Maidstone and remembers hopping well. From his home on London Road, Allington he and his family walked to the farm just past the railway bridge.

David is also author of a book called "*Whitbread: The Inns Behind the Signs*".¹ In the chapter on hop picking David describes that in the early 1900s up to 80,000 hoppers, mainly from Southeast and East London would descend upon Kent each year in the 6-week period from mid-August into September. Indeed, the village of Wateringbury alone would host 5,000 hoppers, requiring a service of 58 special steam trains into Paddock Wood, with the farmers arranging transport by bus and cart to the hoppers' accommodation.

Around the Bull at Hunton were 3 farms all with at least 100 hoppers huts. David writes that to cope with the influx of hoppers, the farmers had to be highly organized to prevent the workers and their families wandering around the county without accommodation and not knowing where work was available. In general, a month before picking commenced, farmers would write to last year's pickers. Rail and bus companies would be contacted, as would medical services, local shopkeepers and publicans, church organisations, local refuse collectors and of course the police. On the first day of picking "Rules of the Farm" were read to the assembled pickers and the penalties for any infringements made clear in no uncertain terms. Although hoppers pay was poor, because of the vast numbers of hoppers, the seasonal incomes of local shops and pubs was boosted substantially. The influx of hoppers to Kent also attracted the "pieman" and ice-cream vendors, tinkers and other traders into the area. Women from the local community would set up trestle tables serving tea, sandwiches and cake, with lemonade for the children. Hoppers were either paid with cash or with special tokens issued by the farmer. If paid in tokens the hoppers were a captive market for the farmer and had to buy his produce. If the weather was bad or harvest poor, they may not have had the cash to pay for the journey home.

In the evenings the hoppers would descend on the pubs. However, hoppers and their families were not always welcome and some pubs prevented them going in the actual bars. Instead they were served through a window or beer was provided outside in galvanized baths.

Most "hopping" came to an end in the early 1960s with the advent of mechanisation. This also meant closure of many isolated public houses. David names several pubs south and west of Maidstone that are sadly long gone, for example in the villages of Hunton, Yalding, Wateringbury, and Mereworth.

¹ David Harper, *Whitbread: The Inns Behind the Signs* (Faversham, David Harper, 2005).

A Legacy of Hop Breeding Research at Wye College

Hop research done at the College is described in an article by Lucy Huntington (2012).² The Wye College hop department closed in 2007. Fortunately, the department head, Peter Darby, was able to continue breeding at Wye Hops Limited, near Canterbury.³

Over 30 commercially available varieties of British hops are still grown, several of which originated in Wye, and just over 50 British farmers are growing British hops in the UK today. The brewing of UK beer and the consumption of it remains popular. Many beers sold across the country are brewed using hops that originated in Wye, including this year beers brewed for King Charles' coronation. In most supermarkets, public houses, and other outlets there are beers available that are made with "Wye hops", which is a great legacy to be proud of.



Examples of beers brewed with hop varieties originating in Wye: Left to right: Coniston Brewery, Bluebird Bitter made with Wye Challenger hops (named after the boat in which Donald Campbell attempted the Water Speed Record on Lake Coniston, Cumbria in 1967); Greenwich Brewery Boadicea Golden Ale brewed with Boadicea hops for Marks and Spencer, mentioning Wye College on the label; Westerham Brewery 9-Hop Kent Pale Ale also brewed for Marks and Spencer, which contains 9 different types of Kent bred and grown hops (Target, Goldings, Pilgrim, Sovereign, Progress, First Gold, WGV, Bramling Cross and Finchcocks' Spirit of Kent); Westerham Brewery Little Scotney Pale Ale initially brewed exclusively for the National Trust uses Wye Target hops from the Trust's only hop garden at Scotney Castle.

² Lucy Huntington, *The History of Hops and Wye College Hop Department*, Wye Local History Spring 2012, Volume VII, No. 5 (Wye Historical Society, 2012).

³ British Hop Association. www.britishhops.org.uk/hop-breeding (accessed 20 January 2023).

Acknowledgements

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Bibliography

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Photo of hop picking at Spring Grove Farm courtesy of Elizabeth Amos