

The Researcher

Newsletter of the
West Sussex Archives Society
The Friends of
West Sussex Record Office

Website: westsussexarchivessociety.webplus.net



July 2015

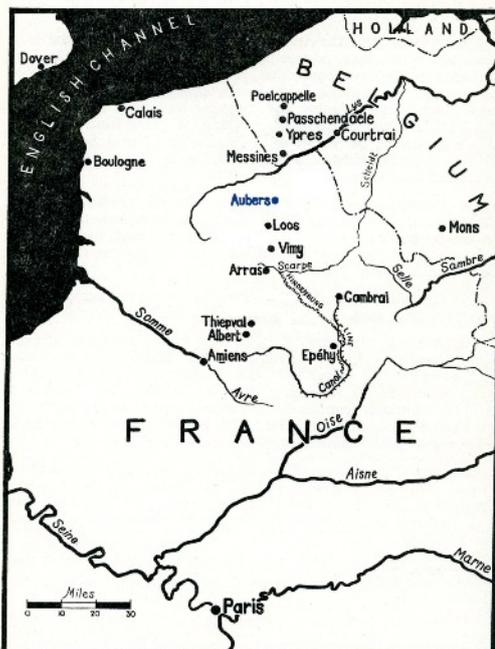
No. 90

The Famous 9th of May: The Battle of Aubers Ridge

By Rhodri Lewis

The Battle of Aubers Ridge was one of the major campaigns of the First World War for the Royal Sussex Regiment and one in which they suffered catastrophic losses that had a devastating impact on communities and families throughout Sussex.

The main objective was to capture the German trenches and redoubts on the plain at the foot of Aubers Ridge and then occupy the high ground. The day began at 3.30am with an issue of tea and rum before the offensive commenced at 5.00am with a heavy bombardment for thirty minutes. The noise of the 600 guns was deafening and the ground trembled under the men's feet. The sight of debris being flung up in the air from the German defences would have been a welcome one to the infantry waiting to charge. Unfortunately, the hope that this would have engendered was false.



The infantry was told to expect little resistance but the artillery failed to destroy the enemy trenches or cut their wire. The men would not have known this when they were told to fix bayonets just before the attack commenced and, although nervous, they were in good spirits.

The 2nd Royal Sussex along with the 1st Northamptonshire were the two assaulting battalions from the south and the 5th Royal Sussex was one of the battalions in support. The front was around 400

Forthcoming Events

September 20th - A visit to Shulbrede Priory

October 10th - WSAS Conference - "Oving: The Parish and Beyond – landscape and legacies".

November 14th - Workshop on Literary Archives and Creative Writing

Any queries about this newsletter or questions for West Sussex Archives Society please email wsascom@btinternet.com

yards wide and to reach the enemy lines the men had to cross flat terrain, raked by carefully sited machine guns. The men were slowed down by the weight of their equipment, some of them carrying sandbags and barbed wire in preparation for defending the ground that would be taken.

As soon as the two assaulting battalions went over the top they were met by German machine gun and rifle fire. The men who were not hit straight away advanced towards the German lines. The flatness of the terrain doubled with the fact that the Germans had a clear view of the advancing British forces left them terribly exposed. It was now clear that the artillery bombardment had failed and had served only to make the enemy aware of an imminent attack. The 2nd Battalion was peppered with machine gun fire from both left and right, and the German marksmen were successful in targeting the Royal Sussex officers.

Although their role was intended only as support, most of the first three companies of the 5th Battalion swarmed over the top to join the 2nd Battalion from the beginning of the battle. "Where the Iron Regiment go, we go too", was the cry. They quickly caught up with the rear companies of the 2nd and the men from each battalion began to merge as they came under severe machine gun fire. The men were left exposed for around sixty minutes before they were recalled. More attacks were ordered that day with the same inevitable result.



In his account of the battle, the popular commander of the 5th Royal Sussex, Colonel Langham, described what he saw "the most murderous rifle, machine gun and shrapnel fire opened... people say the fire at Mons and Ypres was nothing to it." He was obviously proud of his men, saying "no end of brave things were done, and our men were splendid but helpless".

The bloody one day battle was a disaster for the British Army and it is doubted if it had any effect in its aim of assisting the main French attack 15 miles to the south at the Second Battle of Artois. Over 93% of the 2nd Battalion men killed on that day have no known graves and their names, together with those of the 5th Battalion who died on that day, are recorded on the Memorial at Le Touret.

An exhibition on the Battle of Aubers Ridge, featuring the archives of the Royal Sussex Regiment, is currently on display at the West Sussex Record Office.

RECORD OFFICE UPDATE

With the summer well underway and the warmer weather making us appreciate the cooler depths of the Record Office strong rooms, there is much to report on over the last three months: new arrivals at the archives, the end of old projects and the start of some exciting new ones.

First and foremost 16th May saw the arrival of another Record Office baby when Nichola gave birth to Charlotte Elizabeth, a sister for Emily, who is delighted with her new sibling. Charlotte took everyone by surprise when she arrived two and a half weeks early. Nichola had yet to go on maternity leave and was working at the Record Office the day before. Nevertheless at 7lb 14oz Charlotte obviously felt it was time to put in an appearance and we offer Nichola and Sam our warmest congratulations on the birth of their beautiful daughter.



In April we took our first steps towards making our resources available on line when around 100 West Sussex school admission registers from the 1870s to 1914 were digitised and indexed as part of a countrywide initiative with the family history website



Find My Past. The registers record a child's name and date of birth, date of admission, father's name and address, previous school, and date of leaving. They often record why a child left school, with common entries being 'left the parish' or 'gone to Brighton' or recording when a child started work, went into domestic service or 'left to help mother'. Some simply say 'age', indicating that the child had reached the school leaving age of 14. You can now access these records by subscribing to Find My Past or by using the database at the Record Office where the website is available free of charge.

April also saw the end of the hugely successful Graylingwell Heritage Project, which was celebrated with a series of showcase events at Graylingwell, Pallant House Gallery, the Otter Gallery at Chichester University and at the Record Office itself. Katherine has written an account of this for the Newsletter.

April also heralded the breaking news story about the discovery of the fate of Fanny Cornforth - artist's model and muse of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti - which was revealed in one of the patient case books from Graylingwell Hospital. Until



now no-one knew how, where or when Fanny – who sat for at least 60 oils, watercolours, pastels and pencil drawings for Rossetti – had died. The case books revealed that she entered the asylum in 1907 and died in 1909 at the age of 74, suffering from senile dementia. She was buried in Chichester Cemetery in a common grave without a headstone. Cited as a supermodel of her time, the discovery about her final days was made at the Record Office by Christopher Whittick, the biographer of Fanny Cornforth for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), and shortly afterwards by Kirsty Stonell Walker, the author of *Stunner: The Fall and Rise of Fanny Cornforth*. Interestingly it was the release of the indexes of the Lunacy Commission and Board of Control records by The National Archives in partnership with Ancestry that held the vital clue that sent researchers to the Record Office in pursuit of the last days of Fanny Cornforth.

On 9th May we commemorated the Battle of Aubers Ridge, one of the major engagements of the Royal Sussex Regiment in the First World War. Using the Regimental Archives Rhodri Lewis, our Search Room Archivist, has put together an exhibition at the Record Office and has written about this for the Newsletter.

Alongside this exhibition we also have a display about the Battle of Waterloo, which links in nicely with the news of a new partnership project that we are embarking on with Chichester District Council, The Novium and the Murray Club. With the aid of a £63.2K Heritage Lottery Fund grant awarded to the District Council, we will be helping to celebrate the life and times of Admiral Sir George Murray KCB (1759-1819), who became the Mayor of Chichester in 1815, was the Captain of the Fleet and a friend and compatriot of Admiral Lord Nelson. The Record Office holds the Murray Archive, which includes some fascinating correspondence as well as other family papers, photographs and engravings. The project will include an exhibition, events and activities and we will be able to let you know more about all of this in subsequent Newsletters.

Finally I am delighted to be able to share with you the wonderful news that the Record Office has been awarded a £72.9K grant from the Wellcome Trust to catalogue and preserve the Archive of Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead. This funding will enable us to catalogue and preserve this important archive in its entirety and to digitise

all of the Guinea Pig Club patient case-files, which record the pioneering plastic and reconstructive surgery carried out on the World War II airmen by Sir Archibald McIndoe and his team. Queen Victoria Hospital was one of only four national centres for plastic and reconstructive surgery and the sole centre for the treatment of the Allied Air Forces.

We will be working in partnership with the Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, East Grinstead Museum (who hold related collections) and the Guinea Pig Club. I think this will be a very exciting project and I look forward to sharing more about this with you all in the future.

Wendy Walker - County Archivist

Farewell to the Graylingwell Heritage Project By Susan Millard and Katherine Slay

The Graylingwell Heritage Project has now come to an end. It was a partnership between the Record Office, the University of Chichester, Pallant House Gallery, and Chichester Community Development Trust. With a £99K grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, it ran for 18 months, finishing with a series of celebratory events in April.

The Project has been recording the history of Graylingwell Hospital, which opened in 1897 and closed in 2001. The partners and volunteers worked together to research the history of the hospital, create artwork, and record memories, as well as working towards reducing the stigma surrounding mental health. WSRO staff Susan Millard and Katherine Slay were joined by Gillian Edom. Together they worked with 80 volunteers and were responsible for three strands of the project: digitising the 46 patient case books, recording and summarising over 70 oral history interviews with former patients and staff, and indexing local newspaper articles about the hospital. Each of the four project partners hosted an end-of-project event. The final event was at WSRO on the evening of Friday 17th April, at which guests were plied with drinks and a splendid variety of home-made cakes (provided by WSRO staff). There was a chance to look at exhibition boards with photographs and newspaper cuttings, see printouts of some of the digitised case book pages, hear extracts from the oral histories at the listening turret (part-funded by WSAS), look at original documents, and hear talks from both Gillian and Katherine. The project publication, 'Beneath the Water Tower' is now on sale at WSRO, price £5.

Sad loss of WSAS Member - Sue Coward

We are very sorry to announce the death of Sue Coward, who was a long standing member of WSAS, and a regular contributor to the Journal. Sue's articles ranged from *The Copyhold of Broad Stone and Perry Garden in Easebourne* (2012) to *The Binsteads of North Mundham and Australia* (2013) to *The Mystery of Henry Gadd and the Earnley Windmill* (2014). Her most recent research, concerning the Covert family, will appear in the 2015 Journal, along with a fuller obituary. Sue was often to be found at the Record Office where both she and her husband David, also a member of WSAS, were researching the Fernhurst/Ambersham area and more recently North Mundham.

Forthcoming Events at the Record Office and WSAS

Events Review

Family history workshops

If you're new to family history and want to find out more about the sources available and how best to use them, you may be interested in the Record Office 'coffee time' workshops. They start at 10am on the first Wednesday of the month and there are still a few places left on our forthcoming sessions. On 7 October, Matthew Jones will be exploring naval records and, on 4 November, Susan Millard and Rhodri Lewis will provide an introduction to the archives relating to crime and punishment. In response to popular demand, we will also run an extra session on reading old handwriting with Caroline Adams on 12 August.

Tuesday talks

WSAS members are also invited to our ongoing series of Tuesday talks, starting at 7pm, which continue in the Autumn:

- The Royal Sussex Regiment at Loos and Gallipoli 1915 on 29 September 2015
- "Tales from the Rails" - stories from the days of steam on 27 October 2015
- "A Peep at the Pixies" - exploring the life and literary archive of Anna Eliza Bray (1790-1883) on 24 November 2015
- Screen Archive South East - Developing and Preserving the Screen Heritage of Sussex on 26 January 2016

Book now!

If you'd like to come along to a coffee time workshop or a Tuesday talk, please call 01243 753602 to book and pay (advance booking essential). Tickets cost £7.50, which includes refreshments. Visit www.westsussex.gov.uk/ro for more details.

Joint FESRO/WSAS visit to Coombe Place 12th May

The annual joint visit for FESRO and WSAS members took place on a glorious Spring day in May to Coombe Place, Offham which lies 2 miles north of Lewes in East Sussex. The house sits in a hollow under the north side of the South Downs below the site of the Battle of Lewes (1264) and the South Downs Way. It is in a similar South Downs location as other historical houses such as Danny, Wiston Place, Findon Place and Slindon House. Coombe Place has unrivalled views north-east across the Ouse Valley towards the



monument at Heathfield. It is privately owned and not opened to the public being a much-loved family home.

There has probably been a building on the site for centuries but the first known house was built in the Jacobean style in 1657 by Richard Bridger, who bought the estate from the Rivers family. Bridger was the MP for Lewes and a prominent Parliamentarian. The original house contained a courtyard and a service wing and was the focal point of an estate specialising in sheep farming. Bridger re-modelled and extended the house into a square cube with many more rooms, which remains the ground plan today.

Richard Bridger was succeeded by his son, also Richard, who died in 1729 and was, in turn succeeded by his son, John. John Bridger was a colourful character – a speculator, businessman and, ultimately, a bankrupt. He traded from Lewes with two ships to the West Indies but his business was ruined by the Seven Years War.

However, John Bridger did re-model Coombe Place between 1733 – 35 into a building faced with flints and Portland Stone. The architect is unknown but the builder was John Morris of Lewes, who worked on similar properties in the area. Internally the rooms have remained much the same as constructed but all the original fittings have gone except for the stairs and some panelling.

After being made bankrupt in 1765, John Bridger retired from public life and his son, also John, took over the estate with no money. However, he revived the family fortunes upon marrying a Quaker heiress, Rebecca Elliott, who brought a dowry of £22,000. This was used to clear debts and enabled re-modelling of the interior of the house, notably walls and ceilings decorated in rococo plaster and papier mache enrichments. Over the years much of this has had to be re-modelled due to the ravages of damp. The finest plaster work is on the stairs and in one upstairs bedroom where there is also a portrait attributed to Reynolds; this room is said to have been used by George the Fourth when he stayed at Coombe Place.

In 1768, builder John Morris was commissioned to build a Gothic temple in the grounds (currently awaiting renovation) and formal gardens were replaced by sweeping lawns following the fashion of the day. Within the house, the old service wing was demolished to be replaced by a bay window on the north side of the ground floor and a new laundry, brewery and stable block were constructed. The stable block is embellished by a bell tower similar to the one at Glynde Place to the east of Lewes and there is also a tunnel between the stables and the house so the servants could move between the two, unseen by the family and guests. Finally in 1778 John Morris constructed a dovecote on a slope to the west of the house.

John's only child, a daughter, married Sir George Schniffer of Russian descent, whose family traded in the Baltic. Sir George, subsequently, became MP for Lewes. Their son, Henry who inherited the estate, became a Vice-Admiral and a contemporary of Nelson. Henry and his wife built a new entrance to Coombe Place on the south side which did little for the house. Fortunately the entrance was soon removed back to the east front where it faces the drive. The Admiral's brother inherited the estate; he was a clergyman who became the rector of Hamsey in whose parish Coombe Place lies. The next son to inherit also became rector of Hamsey.

The family then went into decline and later generations were blighted by deaths of heirs in WW1 and WW2; one heir died in 1918 and the next heir at Tobruk in 1941. This left the estate to a son of 11 who subsequently sold it in 1952 for £52,000 to the Cannon family. The present owners, Mr and Mrs Martin Armstrong, purchased a much deteriorated house and grounds in 1999. Since then they have undertaken a massive project of restoration following original designs and dealing with damage caused by the Army in WW2 and a period of renting the house out to tenants, who included Lord Snowdon's father, Ronald Armstrong-Jones QC. Today Coombe Place is very much a family house and a working estate. Thanks are given to FESRO for arranging the visit and Mr and Mrs Armstrong (plus their friendly dogs and horses) for welcoming members of FESRO and WSAS to their home and sharing its history.

Helena Millen

VICTORIAN CHICHESTER

On Sunday 14th June eleven WSAS members met our guide, Anne Scicluna, outside the Cathedral for the start of what was to prove a most informative and enjoyable walk through the city learning about the buildings and streets which would have been familiar to people in the Victorian era. As Anne pointed out most of Chichester is still Georgian so our views now are very close to those seen by the Victorians. Of the buildings added by them - schools, factories and shops - some have been demolished in recent decades but Anne set about showing us what remains and what has replaced them.

We started inside the Cathedral where Anne directed us to memorials to prominent local Victorians - Bishop Otter, Dean Walter Hook and William Huskisson. The last named was the MP with the unfortunate distinction of being the first person to be killed by a train. We were reminded that the building itself does have one major Victorian feature, the magnificent spire, which was rebuilt in the 6 years following its disastrous collapse in 1861, under the guidance of Sir George Gilbert Scott. Across the road from the Cathedral stands the Victorian church of St Peter the Great (now Wests Bar). Many original features inside have been retained.

Leaving the Cathedral area we proceeded to North Street to view the "London & County Bank" built in 1899 (now NatWest bank). Almost opposite is a much older building (now Jigsaw and Ernest Jones) which was The Royal Arms. After Queen Victoria was entertained there, declaring the punch most enjoyable, it was often referred to as "The Punch House". Towards the far end of the street we discovered a shop which was the headquarters of Halsted's iron foundry from around 1841. The works themselves were in North Pallant. Examples of Halsted products can still be found around the City, e.g. drain covers.

In Tower Street the Novium Museum is built on the site of a wool factory which in 1895 belonged to Mr Prior and in St John's Street we saw the 19th century "Old Rectory" where we were able to examine the elaborate decoration of flint galleting. St John's Chapel a few steps further on, although pre- Victorian, was refitted in the late 1800s with new pews. We spent some time absorbing the atmosphere of this most interesting place.

In East Street we saw the New Corn Exchange built, to the surprise of some of us, in 1833. Passing through Little London we came to the 1889 "Central Boys School" saved from demolition by the community and used as a meeting place for over 60 groups and activities. In Jubilee Park across the road are a number of Cedar trees planted to celebrate the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of Queen Victoria.

Our last port of call was Priory Park where the park keeper's lodge has Halsted ironwork windows. The Park Keeper in the 1880s was William Mant, a retired baker.

Returning to East Street, Anne pointed out the Victorian extension on the right of the Old Council House and also the upper floor of the Butter Market which was added in 1900 and once housed the art school attended by Eric Gill.

At the end of a fascinating two hours we thanked Anne for the insights she had given us. As a Chichester District Guide who has also served three times as Mayor it is no wonder that we were treated to so many local anecdotes and stories which brought the buildings to life.

The afternoon was rounded off in true WSAS style with tea and cakes in the Butter Market !

Jane Mant



Halsted Cast Iron Window Frames Priory Park



Halsted Cast Iron Cover



Victorian School(Central Boys School)



Much interest for the galetting on the Rectory

Events Programme 2015

Sunday, September 20th - Visit to Shulbrede Priory, near, Linchmere, West Sussex, GU27 3NQ

A rare opportunity to visit this delightful Grade I Listed house, which is not usually open to the public. Situated in a secluded part of north west Sussex the house was built amongst the remains of a 12th Century Augustinian priory, and features wall paintings and a vaulted undercroft. In 1902 it became the home of Arthur Ponsonby (later Lord Ponsonby) the son of Sir Henry Ponsonby, private secretary to Queen Victoria. Arthur Ponsonby was married to the daughter of the famous composer, Sir Hubert Parry, who was a regular visitor. The family continues to live there and will give us a tour of the house, and there will be an opportunity to see some of the Parry archives.

To include tour and afternoon tea. Directions - from the centre of Fernhurst take Vann Road (heading west) for about 1 mile. On the right there is a road which should be signposted to Linchmere (heading north). The Priory is about a mile further along on the left. Meet 2.30pm.

Numbers are limited, so early booking is advised

Saturday October 10th - This year's WSAS Conference is entitled "Oving: The Parish and Beyond – landscape and legacies" and will look at various aspects of the history of the area, together with some specific examples relating to the parish. Topics covered will include agriculture, the Bishops' Palace, windmills and war memorials, and the Woods family. It will be held at Oving Jubilee Hall, which is situated on the main road through the village.

Speakers include, Dr Caroline Adams, local historians and members of the community. There will be a photographic display of 'Oving images past and present' by the Oving Local History Group.

Arrive at 9:45 am for a 10.00 am start; the conference ends at 4.00 pm. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be provided throughout the day. There is a thatched pub and brewery in the village, The Gribble Inn, or you may bring a packed lunch.

The Jubilee Hall will be found on the right as you leave the village, if you are coming from the west (Chichester), or on the left as you arrive in the village if approaching from the east. The hall has a large car park with plenty of parking.

Saturday November 14th Workshop - Come and join us for a fascinating insight into Literary Archives and Creative Writing at the Record Office. Find out about the wonderful literary manuscripts that are held in the West Sussex Archives and discover the ways in which authors, including Kate Mosse, have used the collections as inspiration for the novels and to carry out background research for their stories. A full programme for this workshop will be given in the September Researcher.

There maybe occasions when members wish to attend an event but feel they cannot due to transport limitations. Please do not be deterred, we would encourage you to book the event and indicate with your booking slip that you can only attend if it is possible to obtain a lift. Could we also ask please, that any members coming to an event who feel they could give a fellow member a lift let us know with their booking slip. We can then do our best to marry parties together. Thank you.

WSAS Committee

<i>Richard Mant - Chairman</i>	<i>Jane Mant - Membership Secretary</i>
<i>Leigh Lawson - Vice Chairman</i>	<i>Stella Elliot - Committee Member</i>
<i>Susan Nicel - Treasurer</i>	<i>Barbara Ely - Committee Member</i>
<i>Richard Howell - Acting Secretary</i>	<i>Gillian Thompson - Committee Member</i>
<i>Barrie Keech - Newsletter & Website</i>	<i>Holly Wright - Committee Member</i>
<i>Helena Millen - Information Manager</i>	<i>Helen Whittle - Journal Editor</i>
<i>Wendy Walker - County Archivist</i>	

All contactable using wsascom@btinternet.com

Further Society information is available at the website:

westsussexarchivessociety.webplus.net

Booking Slips

Any query about any event please contact: wsascom@btinternet.com

Events can also be seen at: westsussexarchivessociety.webplus.net

Sunday September 20th - A visit to Shulbrede Priory near Linchmere, GU27 3NQ. Meet at 2.30pm

Cost £9 members, £11 non-members

Names of members attending

Tel No Email, or home address

Names of non-members.....

Amount paid, cheques made payable to WSAS.....

Please return slip by September 6th (if possible) to: WSAS, c/o West Sussex Record Office,

County Hall, Chichester, West Sussex. PO19 1RN

Saturday 10th October. The WSAS annual conference: "Oving: The Parish and Beyond – landscape and legacies". To be held at Oving Jubilee Hall. 9.45 am to 4.00 pm.

Cost: £11 for WSAS members, £14 for non-members, free to local residents (to include tea, coffee and biscuits, morning and afternoon).

Names of members attending.....

Tel No..... Email, or home address.....

Names of non-members.....

Amount paid, cheques made payable to WSAS.....

Please return slip by September 26th (if possible) to :WSAS, c/o West Sussex Record Office,

County Hall, Chichester, West Sussex. PO19 1RN

Saturday November 14th - Workshop on Literary Archives and Creative Writing to be held at WSRO

Cost: £8 members £10 non-members

Names of members attending.....

Tel. No..... Email or home address.....

Names of non-members.....

Amount paid, cheques made payable to WSAS.....

Please return slip by November 1st (if possible) to, WSAS, c/o West Sussex Record Office, County Hall,

Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 1RN
