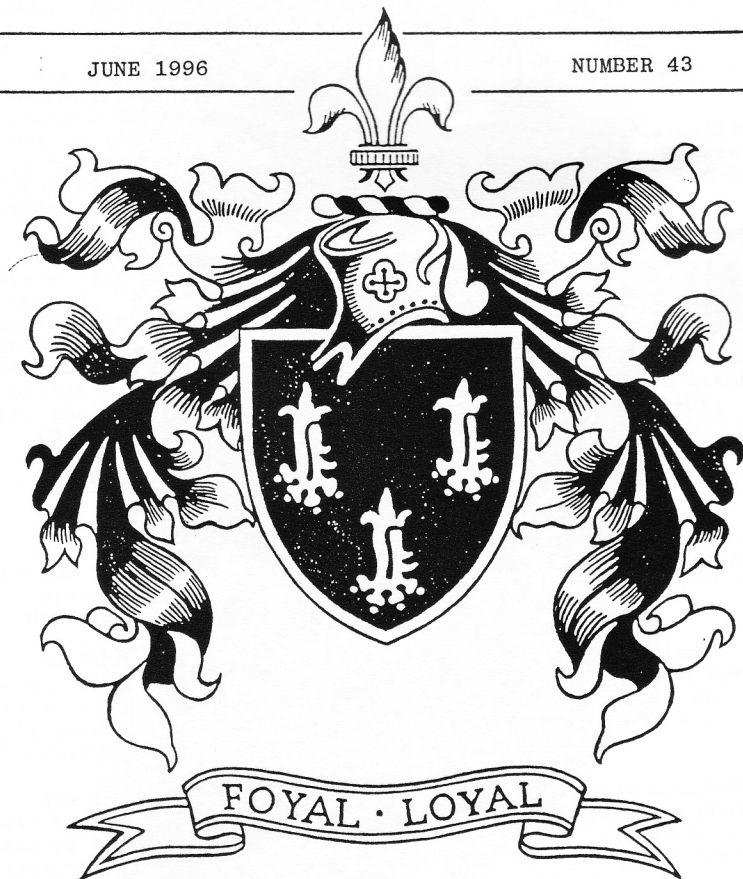


Newdigate Society Magazine

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NEWS FROM THE SOCIETY

On April 12th this year two of our members celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary. We send our congratulations and best wishes to Bert and Mabel Whiffen. They kept an open house throughout the whole day and were visited by their many friends and family.

Unfortunately we had to cancel our Society visit to Windsor which had been scheduled for May 22nd to see, amongst other things, the renovated castle. We had originally intended to hire a coach, but this proved to be too expensive and the alternative of organising groups into private cars ran up against the problem of finding anywhere to park in Windsor for the day.

Our Treasurer, June Sage, is finding that her business and family commitments make it difficult to give full attention to her duties as Treasurer for the Society. We are therefore looking for someone either to replace her or at least to take over responsibility for the ongoing recording of our income and expenditure. Please let the editor know if you are willing to consider this. The matter is urgent.

Our meeting on April 23rd, when Miss Doris Hadingham gave a very interesting illustrated talk on Surrey churches, was very poorly attended - certainly the smallest number for a long time. Your committee was disappointed with this turnout and will hope that attendances improve for future events. Please make sure that you enter our dates in your diary and give priority to them in any later conflict with other meetings, making every effort to attend. After all, these are arranged for your benefit and enjoyment.

FUTURE EVENTS

On Tuesday September 10th we shall be holding our A.G.M. in the Village Hall at 8 p.m. As our speaker for the evening we have asked Victoria Houghton to tell us something of the history of the Lime Pits at Betchworth.

On Tuesday October 29th Ian Currie will be paying us a second visit, this time to talk on "Droughts, Deluges and Dust Devils", 300 years of weather in S.E.England. His earlier illustrated talk was well received and we can be sure that the return visit will be just as interesting.

The 1997 talk programme has been nearly finalised and the Village Hall booked for four occasions. On February 25th Jenny Sherlock, the head of the funeral directors in Dorking will tell us about the long history of her firm, beginning with the early days as coachbuilders and illustrated with examples of some of the old records. On April 22nd Peter Beale will give an illustrated talk on "Light among the Trees", a story of conservation. He has already addressed the Women's Institute on this subject, but will use new material also, so it will be of interest to those members too. It is hoped that our A.G.M. on September 9th will feature Peter Ede from Capel, who will talk about local history, in particular, about Capel. Finally on October 7th David Battie, whose One Man Road Show was so successful, will return to talk on his own personal interest, that of porcelain,

In 1981 Alan Banks wrote a piece for the Dorking Advertiser about the village of Newdigate. It is interesting to compare what he said then with what has occurred during the last 14 - 15 years and the readers' perception of how the village will now develop.

OUR FUTURE

If it were possible to decide the future of our village in isolation from all outside influences, the majority of the inhabitants would vote for no change. Sadly, no area in Britain can be walled off from the surrounding country. Developments occurring outside the locality are likely to bring changes in our environment and way of life. An example is the proposed extension of Gatwick Airport, almost on the doorstep of Newdigate. If the Government permits a second passenger terminal, the consequences could in a few years entirely transform a region within a wide radius of the airport.

Apart from this proposal, there are other more powerful forces at work. Government policies embodied in the Strategic Plan for the South East 1971, the Surrey Structure Plan, which became operative on May 12th 1980, and the Green Belt policy, have worked out in detail how the authorities anticipate the evolution of society during the next decade. There will be restraints in some areas, and controlled development in others. Assumptions based on previous statistics attempt to forecast population trends, but given the cussedness of human behaviour they may well be erroneous.

Over a long period there has been a tendency for governments not to distinguish between urban and rural populations. The Ministry of the Environment refers to villages as "settlements", saying that specific criteria cannot be laid down to identify the confines of a village or settlement. It is thus not an easy task to plan a future for the village, but it is useful to make an appraisal of the situation as it is now and try to suggest what changes we should like to see.

SHOPPING

Before the advent of motor transport local inhabitants were dependent on village shops to supply their daily needs. A postcard published in the 1920s shows the village store with a notice outside reading "Why travel to Dorking or London when you can buy all you need in Newdigate?". To demonstrate this claim there was a display of clothing on coat hangers, footwear, household goods and garden tools. A wide range of groceries was obtainable. Many other businesses flourished, including a harness maker, a blacksmith, a bakery, a brewery, cycle repairer and other artisans. A bus service started in 1923, reducing the isolation of the villagers and their dependence on local shops. Since 1945 most families have acquired motor cars and there is an almost unlimited choice of shopping facilities in nearby towns. The supermarkets offer an irresistible attraction to shoppers, with a wider range of goods than is obtainable in village shops. Not surprisingly the grocery store has lost custom, but it is convenient for the odd purchases forgotten in the weekly expedition to the supermarket. At the grocer's there is a sub-post office, the loss of which could be most serious. There is a butcher's shop which does a good trade and a busy newsagent's. There are no other retail businesses. The future of the grocery store seems most at risk through windling trade, and the only advice which can be given to those who wish to see it stay is "use it or lose it". Barring

unforeseen circumstances it is unlikely that village grocery stores will recover their former status. Turnover is insufficient to attract enterprising shopkeepers and it is feared that, given existing trends, they are doomed. like the old inhabitants, to fade away.

EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING

Apart from a few agricultural workers and a handful of residents who work in a local factory, the majority of the workforce is employed outside the parish, in nearby towns, Gatwick Airport and London. Newdigate has become a popular area for commuters. The Green Belt policy which aims to restrain, nay, prevent the building of new houses or the extension of existing properties in order to retain a cross section of smaller houses for those who work and need to live in the parish, has failed in its objective. The prohibitions have given existing properties of all types a scarcity value which has increased house prices quite beyond the means of this section of the community. The farm workers are accommodated in rented cottages provided by employers and do not wish to buy houses.

Younger people who get married or start work in nearby areas are driven out of the village to find cheaper accommodation elsewhere. As this process goes on, the percentage of elderly residents will increase and the number of children will decline, with the inevitable closure of the village school through lack of numbers. The preservation of the rural environment is a desirable objective, but some modification of the Green Belt policy is desirable if a balanced population is to be maintained. I would advocate that more smaller-type family houses should be built in the parish, suitable for first time buyers. This would be a shot in the arm for the continued life and vitality of the village. As regards employment, it would be wishful thinking to assert that small craft industries would supply a long-felt need for employment in the village. The attractions of employment outside the parish are too tempting to ignore.

EDUCATION, LEISURE AND RECREATION

There is a First School in Newdigate with an average of 80 pupils from 5 years to 8. It is an endowed school deriving some money for its upkeep from a Trust Fund. Monies provided by the Rev. George Steere in 1661 have continued to contribute to maintenance expenses. If the number of pupils fell below 60 the Local Education Authority might decide to close the school as an economy measure. This would be a body blow to the whole life of the village. since young parents would probably move to be nearer a school outside the parish. I would therefore be strongly in favour of a housing policy which would attract young families and the children necessary to keep the school open.

Leisure facilities are provided by a Community Centre which administers the recreation ground, where tennis, football and cricket can be played. The Village Hall accommodates the numerous social events and business meetings arranged by village organisations. The Community Centre hopes to build a squash court and has provided equipment for a children's adventure playground.

I am strongly in favour of the village providing a wide range of leisure activities to obviate the need to travel to nearby towns, such as Dorking (for swimming) and Leatherhead, for the more extensive range of sports at the Leisure Centre. Transport difficulties in getting to these places prevent teenagers from using them. The bus service has been truncated and is quite impracticable.

It would be preferable for the District Council to assist the Community Centre with funds to provide additional sporting outlets in the village itself.

CONSERVATION AND TOWN AND COUNTRY

We are all in favour of conservation when it means preserving the beauty of the environment. In this the Green Belt policy has had some success in preventing the London urban sprawl reaching into the countryside. But there is sometimes a conflict between the conservationists and the farmers who must use the resources of the land for the production of crops and the rearing of cattle and poultry. Difficulties arise when the former urban dwellers believe that their own interests are paramount, largely through ignorance of agricultural requirements.

Many conservationists do not want anything to change, in spite of the fact that agriculture has been revolutionised by mechanisation and intensive farming methods. The pseudo-conservationists would still love to see the ploughman following the plough behind a pair of shire horses. Factory farming is anathema to them. Their attitude is that if farming must take place it should be with the least inconvenience to the residents. There is great indignation when a farmer wishes to cut down trees which, having come to maturity, are just as much a crop as a field of oats. It has been known for complaints to be made of smells from pig manure, or about cows being put into a field crossed by a public footpath. "Conservation" is too frequently used as a smokescreen to prevent any development which might have a detrimental effect on the value of houseowners' properties. The true conservationists are those who pursue the ideal to preserve what is good, but yet recognise that some changes are inevitable, which should not be opposed from purely selfish motives.

Nostalgia for the past produces some curious symptoms in the more sporting types who work in the City, but become country gentlemen at weekends. For some riding is a compulsion: others, during the shooting season, may be seen wearing a deer-stalker hat, tramping across the fields with a shot-gun under one arm and a retriever to heel. This is not to decry the pleasure they may experience from this activity, but to note it as a social phenomenon. It could derive from a deep-seated desire to return to a simpler way of life away from the turmoil of the towns. In spite of these attractions, it is unlikely that there will be any rush to live and work entirely in the country. Most are compelled to keep a foot in both camps.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

Both traffic and parking are problems in the centre of our village. Newdigate is on a through route between Reigate and Horsham, and the "gate" part of its name indicates this transit role from earliest times. Increased development to the south of Newdigate at Horsham, Crawley and Gatwick has generated increasing motor traffic through the centre of the village. At rush hours in the morning and evening a constant stream of cars speeds along the road; In the morning, this is just at the time when children are coming to school, and the lollipop lady has a hard task to ensure the children's safety in crossing the road. Parking is also concentrated in the centre of the village at certain hours of the day, especially in the morning when parents are bringing children to school. To make matters worse, lorries are at the same time unloading materials at a builder's merchant in the centre of the village, which adds to the chaos. There seems to be no obvious solution to either of these two problems so

long as there is a road through Newdigate and the village school and shops remain in the centre of the village.

TOWN AND VILLAGE LIFE

Newdigate has a life of its own quite separate from that of nearby towns. Village organisations flourish, and the Community Centre is booked up almost every night during the winter for social purposes. Without running through the whole list of organisations and activities, many are branches of national associations, such as the Women's Institute, the Royal British Legion, Play Group, St. John's Ambulance etc. A flourishing choral society competes successfully against town choirs in the Advanced Choirs division at the Leith Hill Musical Festival. There is a reservoir of talent covering a wide field of pursuits. The church is well supported both financially and in attendance at services. It is to be observed that the activists in all fields of voluntary endeavour come from the new people who have moved from the towns, and not from the original farming population.

Since many of the inhabitants are commuters, they are glad to turn their backs on the town when the day's work is done and have no desire to travel back there for their recreations.

CONCLUSION

For the future we must try to preserve the identity of Newdigate as a village with a long history, to which its ancient church and timber-framed medieval houses bear witness. At the same time it must be accepted that changes in the environment will inevitably occur in the normal course of evolution. Some relaxation of Green Belt policy to allow additional building of houses for first-time buyers will help to maintain the vitality of the community and the continuation of the school. Assistance in providing more leisure facilities for young people will become increasingly important as working hours are reduced. An adequate bus service to Dorking should be maintained as a link to the outside world for those not possessing motor cars. It seems that by far the greatest threat to the environment will arise from the expansion of Gatwick Airport, which could engulf the surrounding villages for all time in the relentless march of urban and industrial development. Like King Canute's vain endeavours, it may be impossible to keep back the tide.

This was the end of Alan Banks treatise. He wrote with a great knowledge of the hopes and fears of the Newdigate community, for he had been the Clerk to the Parish Council for many years and had seen close to the effect of many of the changes that had taken place.

THE SIX BELLS BARN

By John Callcut

Many of you will be aware that we have now purchased the barn next to the Six Bells in Newdigate, and we will be converting it into our home during the summer months.

The barn was originally used for threshing and has three bays, the total measurements of which are 10 metres by 5 metres. Planning permission has been granted for conversion to a private dwelling with a small extension plus a garage.

We believe that the barn was first constructed about 300 years ago but its original location is somewhat unclear. A photograph taken

in the 1920s adds to the confusion as there is no sign of the existing barn on the site but there is another one set at right angles to the road. A subsequent photograph taken in the 1960s shows this barn still in place and our barn, on a brick plinth, just behind it at right angles. At some stage our barn was dragged backwards and the other barn demolished. Does anyone remember this happening ?

Today the barn is looking very sad. The south side has totally collapsed including the jowl posts and the main posts; the south west side up to the doors has collapsed. All of the sole plates have totally rotted away and much of the studding is rotten in the lower sections. Many of the roof timbers are missing.

During a chilly February morning, Barbara Capel, my son Richard and I conducted a frame survey and numbered each timber. We also noted missing timbers and those which had been inserted incorrectly in later years. Les Fidler, who will be supervising the rebuilding then diagnosed exactly what will be needed to renovate each timber. This was then submitted for approval by Dr. Nigel Barker from Surrey Conservation. The method of reconstruction was then discussed with him and received his blessing.

Initially scaffolding will be erected around the structure and the frame will be supported where necessary. The tin roofing will be removed and the timbers, which will previously have been numbered, will be carefully dismantled and stored. The featherboarding will have to be discarded. When the site is cleared the Mole Valley Archaeological Department will survey the site to ensure that we are not sitting on a priceless monument.

In order to create sufficient headroom inside an oversite of one metre will be dug, the foundations made good and a plinth built up to ground level. A new frame will be erected on the new plinth and new featherboarding put up and painted with original black tar paint. The roof will be tiled with hand made tiles. The original frame will then be erected inside the new structure; and where new timbers are required it is hoped to use local air seasoned oak. As much of the original timbers will be used, with new pieces scarfed into old and rejointed. The guiding principle will be that if at some future date the new outer frame and featherboarding were to be removed then the original frame would stand on its own and maintain its integrity.

Modern insulation will be inserted between the new and old frames to comply with building regulations and a galleried floor will be constructed. The sleeping accommodation will be downstairs and the living, dining and kitchen facilities upstairs. The centre section will be open from the ground floor to the roof and a window will occupy both storeys at the back. The small extension will house the bathroom and utility room and a garage will be built in a similar style to the barn.

We intend working very closely with Mole Valley Planning Department and we hope to revitalise in a sympathetic manner a part of the village which has looked forlorn for a number of years.

(It is important that the general look of the conservation area near the church is maintained. This new structure will still retain the appearance of a barn for the passer-by. Ed.)

We have been able to find a number of stories about manifestations of ghosts and poltergeists, which have been experienced by Newdigate residents and in all but one of these cases have occurred in Newdigate.

The first, about poltergeists, is the one that occurred outside Newdigate but was experienced by Eddie Long, who lives in Winfield Grove. It was his wife Joyce who has given us this information. Eddie was a shopfitter until his retirement some years ago. He spent five months converting a cinema into a shopping facility after the premises had been used by several large commercial companies, as was his usual practice when working away from home, he took with him his camp-bed and bedding, so that he could sleep overnight during the week at his place of work. Here is what Joyce wrote:-

On the first night, sleeping at the rear of the old cinema building, he was kept awake by the banging of doors. In the morning he thought he had discovered the source of the problem; a pair of heavy doors left unfastened. He assumed they had been blowing back and forth, although there were no apparent apertures for a breeze to enter the building. He jammed the doors together with cardboard, making it impossible to move them.

That night he settled down for a peaceful night's sleep, but again the doors were banging. In the morning he went to investigate, and found that the cardboard had been thrown into the middle of the room, and the doors were banging free again.

Although he had been made uneasy by the door business, Eddie was nevertheless set on staying in the building and continued to sleep on the premises. One night he heard running water, and when he went upstairs to investigate, he found the hand-basins wet - they were never in fact used - without the taps being turned on. He returned to his bed and settled down to sleep, only to hear the sound of running water once again. Deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, he remained where he was.

He worked on site for five months, sleeping in the shop every night during the week. However, he did move his bed to the front of the shop for easy access to the exit because of the continuing supernatural activity. He refused to give in to the presence in spite of being - according to Joyce - awake 'quaking every night until about 5 a.m. when things quietened down and he could get some sleep'.

It was about this time that a local lady came into the shop and asked if he had heard about the ghost. Twenty years ago, apparently, the cinema projectionist had hanged himself in the projection room and had haunted the place ever since. The suicide was reported in the local papers. The cinema closed down soon afterwards, and none of the shops that opened on the premises after conversion stayed for long.

One night Eddie was startled by the sound of a buzzer which he could not locate, although the source of the sound was definitely inside the building. Next morning he searched high and low for the origin of the sound, with no success. When he told this story to his brother-in-law, he learned that it was the practice in cinemas to use buzzers instead of telephobe bells in projection rooms.

The most frightening thing that happened was waking up one

morning to find rolls of wallpaper taken from the fitments and laid end to end along one of the gangways. Throughout his time Eddie had seen nothing in the shape of a ghost, but the noises and peculiar happenings continued to disturb him. Even so, he still persevered, determined not to let the supernatural presence in the shop evict him until he was ready to leave.

A colleague of his was less tenacious. One night when Eddie had come home unexpectedly, someone who had gone to help him with the work and had intended to stay the night with him, was so frightened by the noises he ran out of the shop, leaving everything open, and refused to return, even in daylight.

(This story was first published in "True Ghost Stories of our own time", compiled and edited by Vivienne Rae-Ellis.)

Dr. Bill Wheeler tells us the story of Daniel Butcher, who was the licensee of one of the local pubs, probably the Seven Stars at Leigh. One night he was riding his horse down the Old Rusper Road (now called Partridge Lane) towards the bridge at Beam Brook. He was drunk: and the brook was in flood. On reaching the bridge, made at that time of planks, his horse shied and refused to go any further. Daniel spurred on his horse and forced it forward. On reaching the bridge both horse and rider were thrown into the stream. The planks of the bridge had become dislodged and washed away by the force of the water. Daniel managed to save himself but the horse was drowned.

Daniel was later killed when he fell onto some spiked railings. His ghost then returned to Beam Brook bridge and could be seen haunting the area where the horse was lost, as he searched to find him.

Further down the lane stands Sturtwood Farm. Between the wars it was occupied by the Jones family (see magazine no.17 - The Fateful Years). There was a flagstoned passageway running through the house from the front door to the back. Not far outside the back door there was also a well-maintained well. The tolling of a bell could be heard coming from the well, sometimes faint and far away, sometimes very clear.

Late one evening the muffled tramp, tramp of marching feet appeared to emanate from the well, and then it would be of a column of men, heard throughout the house. After a minute or so the sounds of this invisible column gradually died away as the "men" moved towards the front gate and disappeared up the road. But on opening the front door, nothing was to be seen. That day was November 11th.

This next story was told to me by John Jochimsen and was based on what he himself experienced. Coomers Farm, also in Partridge Lane, became the property of the Jochimsens in 1966. Before the house was ready for their occupation - they were having to make alterations and redecorate whilst the house was still empty - they sent two girls to look after the horses and asked them to stay at the house. One night the girls decided to play "ouija", first asking the name of the house. The answer came back - BUTTS - which no-one knew of, but was later shown to be the old (original?) name of the farm (see magazine no. 16). They then asked about buried treasure and were told it was beneath the ice-house. No-one knows where this is and to this day remains undisturbed. No doubt someone who makes a detailed search

will eventually find it. It was quite usual for old houses to have an ice-house near to the main dwelling, into which snow and ice were pushed in wintertime, so that perishable goods could be stored long into summertime.

Later one of the girls found that her toothpaste had all been squeezed out, and the electric kettle kept switching itself on and off for no apparent reason. An electrician was called, but could find nothing wrong. A decorator was painting the ceiling in the dining room, when an apparition emerged, came into the room and left through the french door. The decorator was terrified, and John saw him as white as a sheet sitting in another part of the house. For a long time he refused to go back.

Then the temperature of the old bedroom above would suddenly drop considerably for no apparent reason. The Psychic Society people came to spend the night, after which they confirmed that in their view there was some paranormal presence. But soon after that the poltergeist - for that is what it must have been - seems to have given up. Certainly nothing more was heard or seen of it.

Sandy Thornton, who lives at Simons in Church Lane, tells us that in the days when the Brymer family had the house, they claimed to have seen a ghost in the lounge, middle bedroom and front hall. This story was told to her by Eileen Funnell, who worked for the Brymers. Even to this day Eileen is not keen to go into the front hall, and will not at night.

The ghost was said to be a figure in a hooded grey cloak, who would go down the garden and into the pond. The family used a downstairs room off the front hall (which is now a shower room) as a children's bedroom, although in the days of Dr. Hopkins it had been used as his surgery. The ghost was said to be friendly and would tuck the children up in bed.

Sandy thinks it was later owners, the Bamptons, who saw the figure of an old man sitting in the lounge. When they had the flagstoned floor taken up there, a body - or rather a skeleton - was found and had to be exorcised. There is now no ghost, but many visitors to the house still find it very creepy.

Our last story was given to me by someone who personally saw the ghost herself. This is what she wrote:-

"It was a few years ago and we were looking after the Victorian house in Newdigate for my parents, who were on holiday. At this particular time I was lying on a bed reading a book, with the bedroom door wide open on to a clear view of the landing. A sudden noise made me look up and I saw very clearly, and very close-to, a man leaning over the banisters; he was quite tall with dark, greying hair, which had been trimmed into 'mutton-chop' whiskers either side of his face. He was dressed in a dark grey pin-striped suit and was leaning on the banisters looking down the stairs in what I would describe as a 'brooding silence'.

"My first reaction was one of anger - my brother was in the habit at that time of bringing eccentric strangers home, and I thought that this was just one more stranger, who had been let in - he was so solid, and quite well built. Then I felt very vulnerable because to get away from him I had to pass him in running downstairs. As I got off the bed

and walked towards the doorway and the man, he 'pricked like a bubble' and completely disappeared. As you can imagine I was then really scared, because one minute I was blocked by an apparently solid stranger in his 50s and then found myself gazing at an empty landing.

"When the house was sold, the new owners came over one evening for a drink and they asked if the house was haunted as the daughters of the house had seen exactly the same man in the same position looking down the stairs. Various items in the sitting room were also inexplicably moved around at night.

I did enquire about the domestic history of the building and found out that the man was standing in what had been the servants' quarters of the house, and there is a possibility from his dress that he had been a butler or another important manservant. His image will remain very clearly in my mind for the rest of my life."

These are the only stories that I can put into this article. There may be others known to residents, but which have not been discussed amongst their friends. If there are, it would be good to hear of them.

LEST WE FORGET (Cont)

In our last magazine no.41/42 we omitted one name from the 1914/8 roll call, that of George Alfred Innes, the son-in-law of James Broadwood of Lyne, who lived at Greenings. This is what appeared in the Dorking Advertiser:-

" George Alfred Innes has died in a field hospital in France after an operation for appendicitis on September 9th 1918, aged 37. In October 1914 he joined a Red Cross Motor Ambulance Convoy, British Expeditionary Force, serving with it at the first and second battles of Ypres, was mentioned in Lord French's despatches, and held the 1914 Star. He was afterwards sent to join a convoy attached to the French Army and was present at the Battle of Verdun and subsequent battles, being awarded the Croix de Guerre and two silver stars. He was recently gassed.

A letter received by his wife from the British Red Cross Society HQ. says, 'He was so absolutely devoted to the one object of succouring the wounded, time after time taking such personal risks in doing so, under fire, that the wonder is he was not killed long ago. In all his work he was so absolutely self-effacing and unassuming, so that you would never know from himself of his constant acts of almost unexampled bravery, which the others told me of but never himself A nobler and braver spirit never breathed.



SIMONS