

This is a copy of a letter written to an unknown person, c.1922; by Major J. W. Humphrey of Glenthorne, Brighton Road, Horley, Surrey; who was born in Brockham in 1846. The letter gives some details of life in the Village of Brockham, Surrey, in the middle of the 19th Century.

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Dear Sir (or Madam),

I am afraid I can throw little light on the questions enumerated in your letter of the 7th inst., although an old Brockham Boy.

I left the village in 1860 at 14 years of age and have only visited it occasionally since.

I was entirely away from 1862 to 1882, and then only on a short visit to my old home on my return from a tour of 12 years foreign service with my ever dear old Regiment.

There was no ford through the river at Lockham Barn in my time, of that I'm certain, but there might have been one when the Castle was in occupation, but this would be before the water was held back by the a dam near the Castle Gardens to drive water-wheel that used to work two or three pumps sending water up to the Deepdene.

The late Mr. Hope had large alterations made to both Deepdene House and grounds I believe on his purchasing the Estate, including Boxhill, Betchworth Park and surrounding farms and other lands.

It was he that had Betchworth Castle dismantled and turned into ruins; all this of course, occurred before my day but I remember my Father speaking about it, who knew Squire Peters, the last tenant of the old Castle, and I have often heard him speak of the beautiful lawns and flower beds and flowering trees.

Magnolias, or tulip trees, as they were called by the ordinary people, were very beautiful, these I well remember; mulberry trees too, I used to get these leaves for my silkworms.

Mr. Hope was very good in allowing people to stroll about the Park whenever they felt like inclined and in any part of it; the gate by the brook - I think its name is the Wansell, or a name very like this, was never locked until after Mr. Hopes death but was always free for the people of Brockham to enter and walk around by the Castle and the ground beyond.

There used to be a perpetual spring near the north end of the Castle but some little distance from it, the water running through an iron or bronze lions mouth, with an iron drinking cup attached to a long chain, and very refreshing this used to be on a hot day, or evening, after a childhoods romp over the lawns and around the trees.

The carriage drive under that lovely avenue of trees leading from the Dorking Road above the river, or Boxhill Bridge, has sadly fallen into decay like many of the trees. The chestnuts too, were free to all to pick up when they fell in the Autumn of the year in all parts of the Park where the trees were.

I never heard how Pudding Hole got its name; It was Pudding Hole when I was a boy there, with a fine apple orchard, inhabited by a family named Tate or Tait; I can well remember eating some of these apples 68 years ago, I was then 8 years old and quite a favourite of the then Mrs. Tate.

I do not know how the Straight got its name, in fact have really forgotten where the Straight is, but conclude it is the ground from the Borough to the Dorking road, and on which Lockham Barn stands. There was a small farm yard and cattle sheds besides the barn when I was a boy and was as often called Lockham Farm, but the yard and sheds have now gone; they were there when Mr. Wise farmed these lands.

Mr. Henry Wise first had Feltons Farm, also Knights Farm and Bushinberry Farm; and on Mr. Taylor relinquishing Elm Grove and Pondtail Farms, Mr. Wise added these to his others farms.

I cannot throw any light on the naming of Coles Hill or Root Hill; true I was once informed that many years ago a man by the name of Coles lived at the farm on the west side of the hill, and amongst the people living there it was called after this man's names and the name still remains but this is only hearsay, yet many places have taken their names from this.

I never heard the name Churchfels given to the late Mr. Batchelar's house; The late Mr. Arthur Batchelar's father, Mr. Jonathon or Johnson Batchelar I do not remember having any name to this house and can only conclude Mr. Arthur must have so named it; or his wife might have done so; Mr. Johnson Batchelar lived here years before Brockham Church was built, he was the village tailor, employing two, and sometimes three or more men.

You have an old resident in Brockham, and one who has lived there practically all her days - Mrs. Belchamber - who should be able to give you more information concerning Brockham than I can.

There was no tannery at Brockham in my day, but I think the old tannery was behind the house on the left on the top of the hill looking east, the old white house where the late Mr. George Sherlock lived and died, but it was only a small affair.

The house opposite, *i.e.* on the right hand side of the hill looking east is quite modern so to speak; it was built about 65 years ago and the small back-waters to the brook were then made; before this, this part of the brook was a favourite playground of us boys attending the then village school, and much we resented the confiscation as we termed it, yet our feet were the drier for it, but this was before the days of school boards.

I have not the faintest idea where Mr. Bowmans house is, nor the road named Wheelers Lane, if this is the lane where the school now is, sometime known as Home Lane.

I remember there was a wheelwrights shop just beyond where the Home stands, it was facing the old house looking towards the Green, with its pretty garden and large yew-tree summer house, which I have always looked upon as one of the beauty spots of Brockham.

This wheelwrights shop was cleared away before the Home was built, and the Wright, Mr. Thomas Sherlock, moved to the house just beyond the pond in the Middle Street on the left looking south. He also built the Blacksmiths shop and turned an old barn into a workshop and was a very busy man.

There was no mill within my recollection at the foot of Mill Hill but I have every reason to believe a mill once existed there, as the small branch from the river which starts at the side of the bridge and circles back to the river is an invariable by-water course at water-mills generally to take off the extra flow in rainy weather, and possibly other seasons. No doubt in those days the water had a quicker flow and consequently a greater fall away from the water-wheel; but the back-water in the Park at Castle Gardens, keeping this part of the river fairly full would militate much against the necessary fall from the water-wheel.

There is not the amount of water in the river here now, and at Brockham as there used to be, possibly the dam in the Park is much out of repair and I would doubt very much is now pumped up to the Deepdene as it used to be before the introduction of the water-works, or as it is called, Companys Water, or Municipal Water Supply.

I cannot remember the Wathen, nor where it is situated; is this the withy beds between the two fields on the way to Dorking through Betchworth Park? If it is, I knew it by the name of Wansell, which I was told was the name of the stream there.

There was no carriage drive through that part of the fields and Park in my early days but a footpath only; this drive was made by the late Mr. Hope sometime in the early 1860's.

I do not remember the field named Brittle Ash but fields get their names changed or used to do, by various occupiers or for other reasons. The first field from Brockham, and where I believe football is now played was known, and may be so known as Totnees.

I am sorry I do not remember any of the old songs of those days - there was one man by the name of Dale, one of Mr. Wise's carters who was great on Napoleon and his doings; it ran into 20 verses at least and declared in the words of Napoleon that it was all for a bonny bunch of roses oh! - or - as it was expressed - Ro-as-es! Of course, there were many references to Wellington, more especially to the battle of Waterloo where Napoleon again failed to gather that bunch of roses and became a prisoner on board the Bellerophon but pronounced Billy-roughen. I remember the final words were:- And now St. Helena his body lies low, And all through a bonny bunch of roses oh!. Another of his songs was Moscow all a-blazing, giving the French retreat over the Alps, or as it was expressed by the singer - Over the Whelps.

There were not many occasions when these songs were heard, their hours of labour were long, but at Harvest Homes, when the Farmers generally gave all their employees a half holiday and a supper to follow, songs quaint and curious were delivered over a liberal supply of beer and tobacco.

Mr. Wise was very good with this and did the thing well; also of course at the old Brockham Club feast, always held on the last Monday in May, held at the Royal Oak, now a private residence, the house which lies next to the present Royal Oak and lies back from the path, with the lawn in front of it.

We were all very gay that day, with the usual roundabouts, peep shows, shooting for nuts, etc., etc., the usual itinerary of the Gipsy tribe.

We had a band of course, usually designated the Bletchingley Thumpers, the days proceedings commencing with a Service at the Church, and which all Members of the Club must attend or suffer a penalty; then the March round the Green, Band playing, Club Banners flying, Members wearing their Club favour, consisting of a monstrous rosette of red and green.

We also had a fair in April with the usual Gipsy gathering. The 1st of May was well honoured by the children going round with their Maypoles and garlands, gathering a few coppers where they could, and where successful, thinking themselves small millionaires for the time being, yet only the younger ones could do this, for the boys and often girls were sent to work at 9, 10, and 11 years of age. Very few boys attended school at 10 years of age, they were invariably put to work of some sort, on the land chiefly, especially during haymaking and harvesting.

There were no machines then for cutting and binding or shaking out, it had all to be done by hand; Then the ring of the stone on the scythe was heard all round in the summer, and the ring of the flail on the barn floor in winter. I wonder how many men could swing a flail without giving themselves hard knocks, very few I fear, for it was a very easy thing to do, a false stroke and a bang of the head would be the result, or one had a lucky escape; boys were trained early to this, having a smaller flail than the men, and when boys came to grief as they would at times at this and other employments, they got small pity - usually, serve you right, you'll learn better next time - a splendid education, for of such training were good men made, and I speak from experience.

Farm labourers wages were small; carters and stockmen 14/- per week, other men 2/- per day, consisting of at least twelve hours, unless during Haying and Harvesting when work went on for as long as there was light, or until the dew fell sufficiently to wet the hay or corn and no over-time pay; true, at the end of harvest, carters used to get 30/- about; and other men about 20/- for all the over-time put in.

These men and their families fared none too well on their wages, especially during the

Crimean War, when everything was heavily taxed; I remember for some long time, bread was 1/6d per quartern or 4lb loaf and everything else in proportion. Vegetables were the chief food and home made bread made close and heavy about once a week, there were no attacks of dyspepsia from eating new bread in those days; a few potatoes or a boiled swede was a luxury, especially the swede, which was usually stolen from some farmers field, and being stolen, ate the sweeter!

Certain work on the farms was done on the contract system; men would take on mowing at so much per acre, cutting and tying corn in sheaves. The same; topping and tailing mangolds by the piece, threshing corn by the bushel; hence, men earned a little extra, but they had to work for it, for lines were drawn very fine but labour was plentiful and work often scarce, there were no trades unions then.

At Haymaking and Harvesting all labourers wives and children were employed, and those children too young to work were deposited under the nearest hedge and left until called for, often a little thing of 3 or 4 left in sole charge of the baby: Mother was busy with the hay rake or fork, or cutting and tying up corn; then as soon as the fields were cleared these women and children gleaned, or as they called it, leased these fields, tying up each a handful as it was obtained, the whole being carried home at night, and later on rubbed out, and the corn taken to the nearest mill to be ground. There were more mills working then, especially wind-mills and the flour obtained turned into bread..

Very many of these people kept their pig or perhaps 2 or 3 pigs; These being fattened, killed and parts sold, the remainder put into salt and was about the only meat many of them had.

We had our Ghost there; in fact we had two, and they were seen, yes, actually seen, and no amount of arguing the question could alter this. One was in Tweed Lane, seen by a man named Harding who lived near the foot of Root Hill. This man worked for Mr. Wise, was his stockman and I heard him tell the story.

It was early winter or late autumn, when old Jimmy as he was called, started off to get the then regular killer of pigs, a man by the name of Worsfold, who lived at an old house at Gadbrook, near the farm which has a duck pond in front of it, to kill a pig for him. Now Hardings nearest way was by Tweed Lane, and this he took in spite of its being haunted.

All went well until he got to the centre of the Lane, or thereabouts, when all of a sudden a strong light appeared, not a brilliant light as would appear from a lamp, yet a strong, misty sort of a light: Harding halted and tried to see what it all meant, when suddenly a large luminous calf appeared. Harding said he struck at it with his stick, when the calf suddenly vanished, the light disappeared and all was as dark as it was at first and his stick struck nothing!

Now to go forward when ghosts are about may be dangerous, but to turn back was said to be fatal, so there was nothing for Harding to do but continue his journey. He got to Worsfolds house without further mishap and collapsed in a faint at his door.

Sometime after, he came to himself and related what had befallen him; Of course, he could not return home by Tweed Lane, yet there was no other way than walking by Brockham, taking the footpath across the Leighs, but here another difficulty arose, it was getting very late, or would be by the time a walk to Brockham and across the Leighs had been taken and there was great fear of encountering old Mr. Felton, who was said, nay, had been seen, sitting on the gate opposite the farm-yard. He had often been seen between the hours of 11p.m. and 1a.m., something like a soldier doing his two hours sentry-go.

Now one ghost on one night being as much as old Jimmy could stand, there was nothing for it but to remain until morning. Poor Phoebe (Mrs. Harding) was in a sad way, she was sure her Jimmy had met with some disaster, but what? She said she could not sleep all night and only the morning brought relief when Jimmy returned and the pig killer with him.

Tweed Lane was certainly a lonely spot on those days, there were no houses there then I expect you know how Brockham obtained its name, so I need not go into that,. Also that it is by Charter a Goose Green but not one on which cattle can be grazed; I have seen sheep there but even these are a contravention of the Charter.

As regards old houses, there was an old Elizabethan house on the ground where one or two (I forget which) New Villas are at the northeast corner near the Dukes Head and the road leading to Court Lodge Farm. Someone of note must have lived in this house in the past, it was fairly large and was made into or divided up into 5 portions for working men and their families, it went by the name of The Court.

I remember the steps up a mounting block for Ladies and Gentlemen to mount their horses from, and I have heard that it was from this Court that the farm took its name.

Should there be anything further you would like to consult me about, I shall be very pleased to give what information I can: I am leaving Horley next month and have not settled where my next anchorage will be, but of course a letter will follow to where-ever I may halt.

With many apologies, yours very truly,

J. W. Humphrey.

(*Copied from the original letter by:-* Alex Leslie Street. 13th February 1987.