



The  
**BULLETIN**  
of the  
**EAST GRINSTEAD**  
**SOCIETY**

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THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY  
[www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org](http://www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org)

**The Society was founded in 1968 to protect and improve the amenities of East Grinstead and its environs. The Town has a long history and a unique architectural heritage, entrusted for the time being to the hands of our generation. It should be our concern that such contributions as we in turn make are worthy of the past and a fitting bequest to the future. Key to this is an active role in scrutinising planning applications and regular liaison with planning authorities and our publications: of which the *Bulletin* is one.**

The *Bulletin* was established and edited by Michael Leppard. This is the second *Bulletin* to be produced since his death and in a very real sense, the continuance of the *Bulletin* is both a tribute to Michael's legacy to the Town and a source of future research on the Town's history,

The *Bulletin* is an important tool for highlighting the rich and varied history of the Town and a key resource for the general reader, schools and researchers. As such we welcome suggestions for topics to be covered and, of course, draft articles for possible inclusion.

The strength of the Society lies in the extent to which it can be seen to represent public opinion: the larger the membership the greater the influence. We are committed to expanding our membership by offering benefits such as a regular Newsletter and meetings and a social programme when conditions permit.

Full information on the Society and updates on activities can be found on our website: [www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org](http://www.eastgrinsteadsociety.org).

We also welcome comments on the *Bulletin* and any aspect of the Society's role to: [Chairman@eastgrinsteadsociety.org](mailto:Chairman@eastgrinsteadsociety.org).

James Baldwin - Chairman

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## Introduction

This year saw the death of His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who visited East Grinstead in his capacity as President of the Guinea Pig Club. Bob Marchant has paid tribute to him. The Queen and Prince Philip visited nearby Ardingly College in 1958, after opening Gatwick Airport, so extracts from *The Mid-Sussex Times* describing that day are included, highlighting the Duke's role.

In 1758, smugglers and supposed murderers were hanged in East Grinstead, according to a notice in Weymouth, spotted by Mrs Ann Edwards. In 1785, the Tower of St Swithun's church fell on 12 November, shattering the medieval church. An account written at the time is given.

Graham Edwards has provided a newspaper report of a runaway horse in the town in 1890. The accompanying photograph gives a delightful impression of East Grinstead's High Street in 1890.

Current restoration work on Sackville House has prompted a look back at the history of the house and an account of the stained glass work and designs of its most famous resident, Geoffrey Fuller Webb. Windows with his trademark spider's web can be seen at St Mary's church, and there are other examples of his work at St Swithun's church.

An early description of a railway ride from East Grinstead, enjoyed by Warden of Sackville College the Rev'd Dr John Mason Neale has been included. Michael Leppard discussed this with me in a letter. Perhaps others would like to continue looking into the history of the railways in East Grinstead?

Dr Kathryn Ferry's new book, *The Old Convent: John Mason Neale, George Edmund Street and the Society of St Margaret*, commemorates over one hundred and fifty years since the Sisters first lived at the Convent. The architecture, the foundation of the Society and the work of the Sisters are all important aspects of East Grinstead's history and the book is reviewed here.

A book about the Flora of East Grinstead was compiled in 1836 by WH Coleman, who was briefly a tutor to the Crawfurd family. Michael Leppard's discussion of the book with Mr Crawfurd, a descendant of that family, is revisited, because Mr Crawfurd had access to the only printed copy of this book.

Robin Whalley has taken up Michael Leppard's challenge to readers to find out about and try to date the carved portrait heads at Sackville College and at The Bookshop.

As the front cover picture shows, a plaque was put up on the High Street to honour Michael Leppard and all his work for the town and its history. His books and articles in the *East Grinstead Society Bulletins* and elsewhere are a treasure trove, which we can continue to explore and add to.

## HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh and President of The Guinea Pig Club

by Bob Marchant

It was with great sadness that the news of the passing of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 was received.

Since taking over as President of the Guinea Pig Club in 1961, following the death of Sir Archibald McIndoe, His Royal Highness always took a great interest in the Club's activities, attending many of the Club's annual reunion dinners at the Felbridge Hotel, or by sending his best wishes if he was unable to join in person. He also visited the Queen Victoria Hospital, firstly in 1965, when he toured both the Research Laboratories and the McIndoe Burns Unit. He returned later in 1995 to open the newly built eight-bedded Burns Unit, together with a visit to the then Hospital Museum and the Children's Ward. On each occasion he proudly wore his Guinea Pig Club tie.

His last official function on behalf of the club was in 2016, when he unveiled the Guinea Pig Club Memorial Stone in the National Memorial Arboretum. Many of the Guinea Pigs had the pleasure of attending and taking tea in the company of His Royal Highness.

Whilst within the company of the Guinea Pigs, His Royal Highness always appeared very relaxed and sociable, taking great interest when talking to as many members as possible during his time spent with them.

Many tributes have been paid to honour the Duke of Edinburgh, but he will be remembered for his loyal and devoted service as the President of this unique Club and its members for over 59 years. His name will also be remembered within the realms of the East Grinstead Museum, which proudly displays the Rebuilding Bodies & Souls Exhibition, remembering both McIndoe & the Guinea Pig members, together with the people of East Grinstead, who over the years have given their support to the Guinea Pig Club members, who regard East Grinstead as THEIR Town.

Prince Philip will be sadly missed by all who had the privilege knowing him and meeting him over the years. I, myself, had this privilege on at least 4 occasions.

R Marchant FCODP

Secretary, The Guinea Pig Club



*With thanks to Bob Marchant for the picture and this article.*

This association with the town of East Grinstead and the members of the Guinea Pig Club was an interesting aspect of the life and work of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

*Over seventy years ago, The Queen and Prince Philip officially opened Gatwick Airport, and visited Crawley and Ardingly College. My late parents kept the cuttings from the local newspaper.*

## Visit of the Queen and Prince Philip to Gatwick Airport, Crawley and Ardingly College, 9 June 1958

On 9 June 1958, the Queen and Prince Philip visited Ardingly College.

*The Headmaster was the Rev'd George Snow, later Bishop of Whitby, and the visit, which was to mark the centenary of the school, was brought about by the Headmaster and Harold Macmillan.*

*The Mid-Sussex Times* for 18 June 1958 reported:

'Her Majesty and the Duke came to Ardingly after an extremely busy day in the northern part of Sussex...The Queen officially opened the £7,600,000 Gatwick Airport before being accompanied by the Duke on an extensive tour of the Crawley New Town area...'

They arrived at Ardingly in what Jon Snow (son of the Headmaster) described as 'the largest Rolls Royce I had ever seen.'<sup>1</sup>

The article in *The Mid-Sussex Times* continued:

'It was in the Art School that the observant Duke noticed one boy whom he had seen earlier in the Day Rooms. 'My word', said the royal visitor, 'you transported yourself pretty quickly'. Here, too, the Duke noticed a 16 year old boy at work on a charcoal drawing of a tree and learnt that, like himself, the boy would be celebrating his birthday the next day. The Duke had noticed an almost identical drawing included in the art exhibition and was told that the tree was in the grounds near the Art School. Later, after watching a PT display, the Duke chatted with the smallest boy, aged nine'.

[*The Queen and Prince Philip passed through the reading cloister]*

'Here the Duke took special note of a copy of last week's issue of *The Mid-Sussex Times* on one of the reading desks and read the captions to the two front page pictures'.

'Some of the senior boys bowling and batting at the cricket nets caused the Queen to comment upon the interest now being taken by Prince Charles in the game, and when the Duke remarked that the pavilion 'could do with a coat of paint' he was informed that it would shortly be replaced by a new and up to date pavilion as part of the plans for commemorating the school's centenary.'

*These extracts from the 1958 show Prince Philip being keenly observant, and very good at remembering faces and making connections with people through good-humoured remarks.*

<sup>1</sup> Jon Snow, *Shooting History*, (Harper Collins, 2004), p. 24.

*In 2002, the Queen and Prince Philip again came to Ardingly to the South of England Showground. On the BBC South East news that evening, footage showed a small girl pointing at Prince Philip and saying: 'Look, Mummy, there's the King'. The camera showed Prince Philip looking greatly amused.*

*May he rest in peace after a long life of service.*

## Anniversaries

### Fall of the Church Tower 1785



In 1683, the steeple or tower of St Swithun's church was struck by lightning and set on fire. Bells melted because the fire was so fierce, but the body of the church was saved from injury. The rebuilding was apparently badly done, leading to the collapse of the tower 102 years later.

This is an account of the fall of the Tower of St Swithun's church, in 1785.

### Falling Down of East Grinstead Church Tower 12 November 1785



'The tower had been rebuilt in 1684, after having been burnt by lightning, September 6<sup>th</sup> 1683. A large crack had shown itself some time previously at the foundation of the north-west angle, which passed through the stone staircase contained in that aisle; a large part of the foundation had at different times fallen down, which revealed the badness of the materials, being a casing of

indifferent stone, and the interior filled up with rubbish.

The bells were 6 and very heavy. They had not been rung for some time as they shook the tower very much. On Saturday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, a quantity of stone had fallen from the north-west angle; soon after, stones were found at some distance from the foundation, through the pressure, as if thrown from an engine. Then the great crack spread fast up the tower, which soon showed other great cracks. Stones were then heard to fall inside. Then the tower suddenly divided north and south at the top.

The minarets then fell, the north-east one falling on the roof of the church, and driving the rafters against one another, beat down 3 pillars out of 4. This, together with some large stones falling from the south-east angle, unroofed almost all the north and middle aisle beyond the pulpit, as well as one of the pillars in the south aisle, which came down and caused the unroofing of the south aisle.

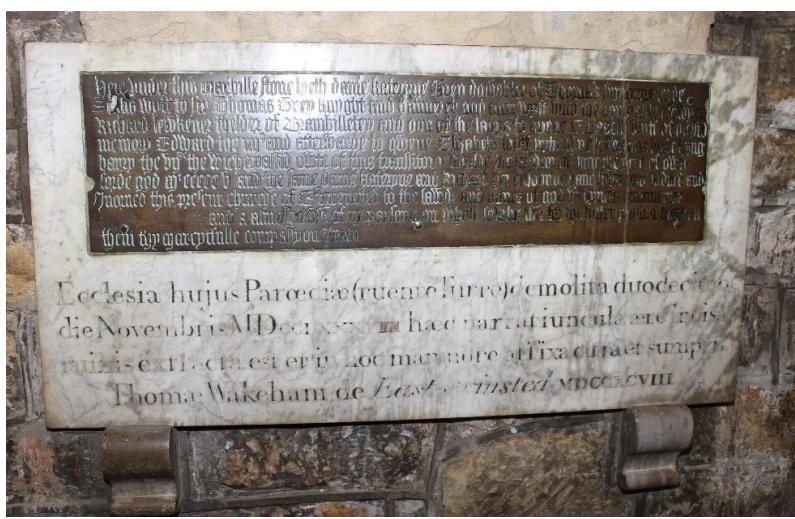
No persons were hurt, although several had been in both the church and belfry a few minutes before, a wedding having taken place that very morning. The Master and scholars had only just left. The schoolroom, which adjoins the church, was also destroyed.

The tower was upwards of 80 feet high, exclusive of the minarets (pinnacles) and 27½ feet square.

5 of the bells lay on top of the rubbish, covered with the lead of the roof. The other bell was under the rubbish. The 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> were found to be quite sound; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> were badly damaged, whilst the 4<sup>th</sup> had its crown broken off.'

(Thought to be the account of Thomas Wakeham. Taken from J.C. Stenning 'Notes on East Grinstead' in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (1868), 132-174).

The destruction was extensive. It is a wonder that nobody was killed. Much of the medieval building was lost, along with at least 4 monumental brasses. One brass was for a John Morton or Sproxton, who was chaplain to Richard Lewkenor of Brambletye and Lewkenor's second wife, Dame Katherine Grey.



Katherine Grey's monument was broken, but the inscription and the figures of her 2 husbands, Sir Thomas Grey and Richard Lewkenor (c. 1505) were rescued, along with the wrong central figure- that of an unidentified male civilian (c. 1520), instead of a figure of a lady, or a shroud figure as Katherine had requested in her will.

Thomas Wakeham, (1728-1803) a local lawyer, rescued the pieces and had them reset within his own marble monument underneath.

His inscription is in Latin. Roughly translated, it means: 'This parish church was demolished by the ruin of the tower on 12 November 1795. This inscription and these figures were extracted from the ruins and affixed to this monument by Thomas Wakeham of East Grinstead, 1798'.

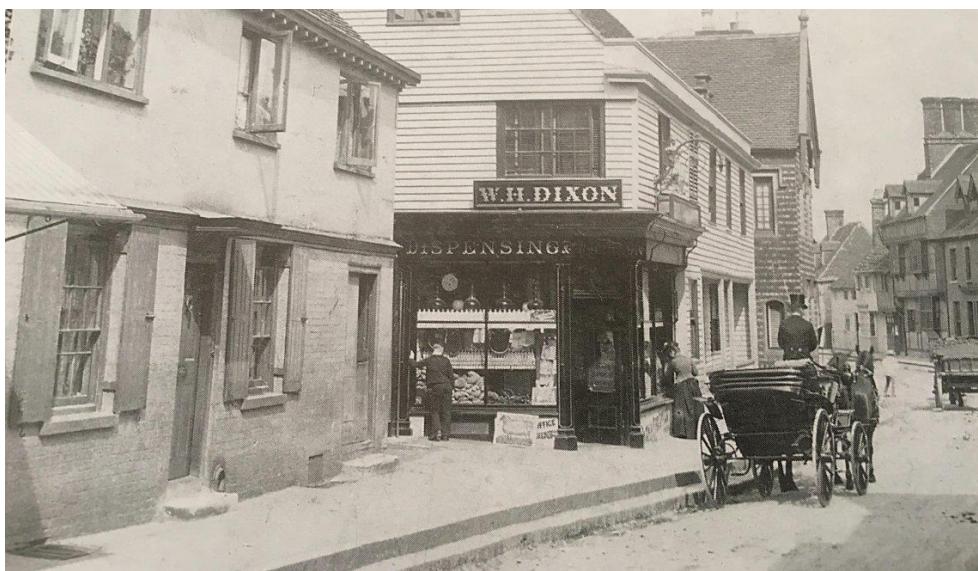
The rebuilding of the church took a long time and cost about £30,000, a vast amount then. Some church walls had to be pulled down. Some of the pillars and capitals were preserved

and are now considered very fine examples of the late Perpendicular style. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1787 for the rebuilding of this church. The date 1789 is engraved in a stone over the west door of the church. In the tower belfry, the date 1813 is carved. There is a story that Mr Speaker Abbot, who lived in Forest Row at Kidbrooke, required the tower to be 25 feet higher than the old one, so that he could see the weathervane from his house. (Forest Row was part of the parish of St Swithun's at this time). The last 25 feet proved to be very expensive. Mr Abbot bought Kidbrooke in 1805.

### **From the Sussex Agricultural Express of Saturday 21 June 1890 under the heading "East Grinstead":**

Graham Edwards has kindly contributed this article.

ACCIDENT ON TUESDAY MORNING - Miss Kate Smeed, daughter of Mr E. Smeed of Fairlight Farm, drove into the town and left the horse and cart standing near Mr Dixon's shop whilst she went inside. The horse appears to have been frightened in some way and started off. Miss Smeed attempted to stop it by catching hold of the reins but was dragged onto the road and one of the wheels went over her legs. The unfortunate young lady was taken into Mr Lambert's and, on examination, it was found that, although the leg was bruised and swollen, happily no bones were broken. Miss Smeed was naturally shaken and frightened by the occurrence but was able to return to her home later in the day. The accident was the more unfortunate as the young lady was on a mission of love when coming into the town, her object being to obtain medicine for Mr Schofield, to whom she was to have been married on Monday last, but the wedding had to be postponed on account of his illness. It is to be hoped, however, that when the present spell of misfortune which seems to be hanging over them shall have passed away, they may be united, and enjoy married life free from misfortune.



Photograph by kind permission of Jonathan Parrett at East Grinstead Town Museum. The picture is also in Michael Leppard, *100 Buildings of East Grinstead*, 12.

The reason for the formation of East Grinstead Society was the demolition of 30-32 High Street, a chemist's shop, in 1968. Mrs Ann Edwards remembers going into the shop before it was demolished. Graham Edwards has kindly provided the news clipping about his great aunt, Kate Smeed, and an accident in the High Street, outside a different chemist's shop, which gives us a fascinating snapshot of life in East Grinstead at the end of the 19th century.

Graham added: 'Although the cutting refers to a chemist's, it is not the one that was demolished in 1968. It was on the opposite side of the High Street next to the access to St Swithun's. 51/53 High Street was occupied by Walter Henry Dixon, Chemist & Dentist. Arthur Lambert was a 20 year old "chemist's assistant" in the shop, who was born in East Grinstead and lived with his parents at 40 Queen's Road'.

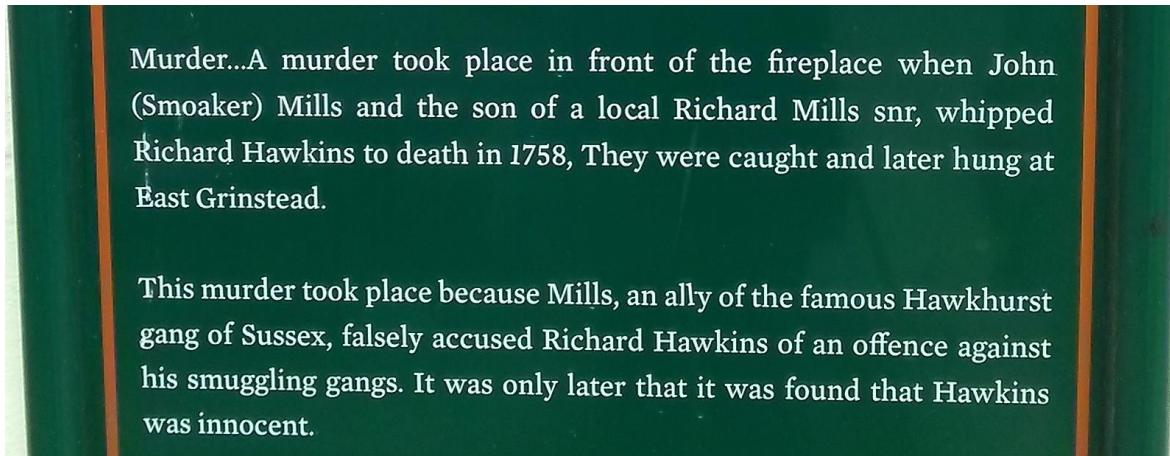
'Kate Smeed's fiancé was Samuel Reuben Schofield, another chemist's assistant, but I don't know where he worked. After their marriage in St Swithun's, they lived in Rock Cottage, which was situated between 16 & 24 Queen's Road'.

'30/32 High Street was occupied by Henry Martin, Chemist & mineral water manufacturer'.

Graham remembers visiting his great aunt, who recovered from her ordeal and became Kate Schofield when she married her fiancé.

## Hanging of Smugglers and Murderers in East Grinstead

At Weymouth, the Black Dog pub on the seafront has a notice about smugglers, and two murderers who were caught and subsequently hanged at **East Grinstead**.



Murder...A murder took place in front of the fireplace when John (Smoaker) Mills and the son of a local Richard Mills snr, whipped Richard Hawkins to death in 1758, They were caught and later hung at East Grinstead.

This murder took place because Mills, an ally of the famous Hawkhurst gang of Sussex, falsely accused Richard Hawkins of an offence against his smuggling gangs. It was only later that it was found that Hawkins was innocent.

Thank you to Mrs Ann Edwards for this photograph.

*Mr Speaker Abbot, who lived at Kidbrooke and requested the extra 25 feet on the church tower so that he could see it from Kidbrooke, apparently wrote to the Home Secretary asking for the bodies of highwaymen, which were publicly displayed, to be removed whenever his wife's carriage was due to bring her into East Grinstead. Perhaps he wanted the bodies of smugglers and murderers removed as well.*

## Sackville House, and Geoffrey Fuller Webb (1879-1957)

Sackville House, on the High Street in East Grinstead, is undergoing extensive restoration.

Michael Leppard wrote in his book *100 Buildings of East Grinstead* that the house was dated by the Wealden Buildings Study Group to about 1525, was converted to an inn, The Lion, in 1574, and that its roof was rebuilt with dormer windows in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest documentary evidence dates from 1564. The Sackville family had acquired the house by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the name Sackville House is only found after 1885, when the Sackvilles no longer owned it. The house is a Grade 2 listed building.

In 1919 it was acquired by Geoffrey Webb. Geoffrey Webb was a nephew of the famous architect Sir Aston Webb, whose work in London included repairs to the eastern façade of Buckingham Palace and Admiralty Arch. Geoffrey Webb trained at the Westminster School of Art. Geoffrey worked with Charles Eamer Kempe, who lived at Old Place, Lindfield and created many stained glass windows in churches. Christopher Webb, Geoffrey's brother, was articled to Sir Ninian Comper.



Left: Stained glass window by Kempe in St Swithun's church, with his trademark haystack design on the left between the two scenes.



Rood screen figure designed by Sir Ninian Comper. The Majestas or Christ in Glory designed by his son, Sebastian Comper, is above.

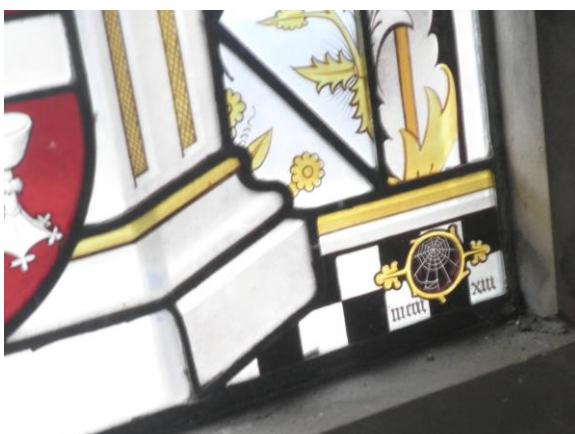
Geoffrey Webb designed the boards in the entrance porch at St Swithun's church, whilst WH Hills was responsible for the wording. Webb was also involved in designing the Hastie Memorial doors on the North Wall of St Swithun's. These doors were made by Robert Thompson of Kilburn and are famous for having two of Thompson's trademark carved mice at the bottom. The Thompson workshop at Kilburn in Yorkshire told me that these are quite early examples of the mouse trademark. The Vicar in 1926, the Rev'd Golding-Bird, wrote of 'two little casual mice, doing nothing in particular except to prevent all sense of the conventional and the machine-made'. There are connecting strands linking Webb with Thompson, Kempe and Comper at St Swithun's church in East Grinstead.



Geoffrey Webb set up a studio in West Street, East Grinstead. He received many commissions to design new stained glass, but also to restore old glass.

P. F. Anson wrote: '*For many years Geoffrey and his family made their home in the picturesque half-timbered Sackville House, facing the parish church at East Grinstead. It was a perfect setting for this lover of medieval English art and might have been built specially for him'.*

Webb was well versed in Anglican liturgical traditions and published a theological treatise 'The Liturgical Altar' in 1933. He was interested in some of the forgotten medieval traditions of ritual and ceremony in the church.



Although there are no Geoffrey Webb windows in St Swithun's church, there are 5 at St Mary's church, Windmill Lane, with his trademark spider's web in the corner, as well as some at St John the Divine, Felbridge. Geoffrey Webb also designed the grille in the wooden gates to Sackville House, enabling people walking past to see the countryside beyond.

He believed that a church should fit in with its environment. As for stained glass, he believed that in Northern Europe, the purpose of

stained glass is not to keep out the light, but '*to flood the interior of a church with daylight of a clarity and softness that no artificial flood lighting can match for beauty, and yet with the same absence of glare which the artificial method provides.*'

P. F. Anson described Webb's stained glass as having '*the quality of spring meadows and hedge flowers. More often than not, patches of clear strong colour are set against a background of bright silvery white.*'

Webb's most unusual work may be seen in stained glass windows in the parish church of All Saints, Daresbury, in Cheshire. The vicarage was the birthplace of Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1832. The window was created to mark the centenary of Dodgson's birth. There is a Nativity scene with both Lewis Carroll and Alice in the left-hand panel. In 5 panels below there are characters from 'Alice in Wonderland', including the White Rabbit, the Mad Hatter and the Cheshire Cat. It is rare to have fictional characters depicted in stained glass in churches.

Geoffrey Webb was received into the Roman Catholic church, two of his brothers became priests, and one of those subsequently a monk, a sister became a Benedictine nun and 2 of his sons became monks.

One of the sons, Father Benedict, first wrote to the Landmark Trust offering the house and saying that 'nothing would give our family more happiness than to know that the future of Sackville House is assured as a residence and with its beautiful garden intact'. Geoffrey Webb's daughter, Mrs Ursula Honess, left the house to the Landmark Trust, who inherited it in 1995.

MJ Leppard, *100 Buildings of East Grinstead* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2006), 24.

<https://www.felbridge.org.uk/index.php/publications/stained-glass-st-john-divine/>

<https://www.liturgicalartsjournal.com/2020/07/the-life-and-work-of-geoffrey-webb.html>

## Railways

East Grinstead became a railway town in the nineteenth century. Here are two glimpses of the beginnings of the railways in East Grinstead.

### John Mason Neale on Railways

As the Bluebell Railway is once again running right into East Grinstead after a pause during the pandemic, it seems appropriate to include John Mason Neale's description of his first experience of a train ride.

In a letter to a friend, in 1855, in which Neale was commenting on the progress of the Sisterhood, he wrote:

*"Here I was interrupted by a message that an engine was at the station and I might have a ride to Three Bridges if I liked. I went down, and we ran over in 12 minutes! Just fancy that! Riding on an engine is unspeakably delightful!"<sup>2</sup>*

The Three Bridges to East Grinstead Line was opened in 1855. Michael Leppard confirmed that John Mason Neale must have been invited to ride on the footplate of an engine.

'It was written on 7 July 1855, two days before the opening, when test-runs would have been being made. Anyone who travelled on the line when it was still steam-operated will remember it took much more than twelve minutes to reach Three Bridges when hauling two or three carriages. Someone in authority must have known of Neale's enthusiasm for railways and given him the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity'

In his sermon on the following Sunday he referred to the work of building the line that had begun two years before (*Sermons in Sackville College Chapel*, vol. 2, p. 57; cf. p.271). Passing mentions in earlier sermons show he had been following its progress.

I do not know when he made his first rail journey. The earliest mention I can find of his doing so is in March 1842, a perfectly matter of fact statement that he had gone to Bridgewater by train from Bristol. In his East Grinstead years he travelled widely by train across Europe pursuing his researches'.

John Mason Neale founded the Society of St Margaret in 1854. The Sisters went out to help the poor and the sick, sustained by a life of prayer devised by Neale. Dr Kathryn Ferry recorded:

'Sister Ellen of the Society of St Margaret, who had trained at Westminster Hospital, was the first of Neale's Sisters to respond to a call for nursing help, in Shoreham. She took the first ever train to leave East Grinstead on 9 July 1855'.<sup>3</sup>

## Publications

### [Review of The Old Convent, East Grinstead: John Mason Neale, George Edmund Street and the Society of St Margaret, by Dr Kathryn Ferry \(2021\)](#)

In under two hundred pages, Dr Ferry has produced a fascinating and clear account of the history of the Society of St Margaret and its Convent buildings. The Old Convent, as it is now known, has been divided into thirty-one private dwellings, which, like the grounds, are not open to the public. The building of houses in Sister Ann Way has created a better view of the Old Convent buildings from Moat Road and made us curious about the place, its history and its part in town life.

Dr Ferry, a local resident and an architectural historian, has used a wealth of material, some from the archives of the Society of St Margaret, now held at Pusey House, combined with

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<sup>2</sup> A.G. Lough, *John Mason Neale: Priest Extraordinary*, (privately printed, Devon, 1975), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, p. 119.

architectural and historical works and surviving photographs of Convent life. Her book is beautifully illustrated with sketches of the Old Convent buildings by a current resident, architectural drawings by G.E. Street, colour photographs of an altar frontal designed by G.E. Street and embroidered by the Sisters for the opening of their Convent in 1870, and another altar frontal embroidered by the Sisters for York Minster. There are black and white photographs of the Founder, John Mason Neale (1818-66) and of some of the earliest Sisters, paintings of orphans in the first oratory in an outbuilding in Church Lane, East Grinstead, and pictures of tickets for the laying of the Convent foundation stone in 1865 and for a Patronal Festival luncheon in 1975 on St Margaret's Day, 20 July.

Dr Ferry has told a story of extraordinary human endeavour. The Society of St Margaret was founded by the Rev'd Dr John Mason Neale in 1854. He was the Warden of Sackville College from 1846 until his death in 1866. At first there were a few Sisters who helped the residents at Sackville College, then a house was taken in Rotherfield so that the first Mother Superior, Mother Ann, could still care for her elderly clergyman father there. Neale rented houses in Church Lane for the growing number of Sisters, their orphanage and school. Larger buildings were needed and G.E. Street designed the Convent. Neale saw the foundation stone laid, before his untimely death. Neale's second daughter, Mary, wrote that:

*'The Society of St Margaret spread into all corners of the world, with houses in America, Asia, 3 daughter or affiliated houses, 30 missions or smaller houses, and which besides its original work of providing nurses for the sick poor in their own homes, had schools, orphanages, convalescent homes and did much parochial work.'*<sup>4</sup>

The Society was one of the first Sisterhoods established after the Reformation. It came about through Neale's desire to help the poor by providing nursing. Neale was linked to the Oxford Movement and the Tractarians, Pusey and Newman, and Neale co-founded the Cambridge Camden Society. Dr Ferry explains complex theological ideas in an accessible way. Similarly, Dr Ferry outlines the architectural ideas of G.E. Street, William Butterfield and Pugin, making the concept of Victorian Gothic clear to the reader, through beautiful images of plans and her explanations of the historical context.

Dr Ferry has selected apt quotations which make her point vividly. She cites a description of the East Grinstead Sisters and their 'conspicuous buoyancy and cheerfulness, contrasting so forcibly with the popular idea of the morbid depression supposed to be inseparable from the life of a Sister of Mercy' from *The Guardian's* obituary of Neale.<sup>5</sup> Another voice used is that of Sister Gabriel, describing the early house, 8, Church Lane as 'small and very barely furnished but full of joy, hope and desire for total giving' in 1856. It is powerful to hear these voices from the past.

The happiness and fulfilment expressed by surviving letters of some of the Sisters support Dr Ferry's argument that entering the sisterhood could be a form of liberation to these

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<sup>4</sup> M. Lawson, ed., *The Letters of John Mason Neale, edited by his daughter*, (Longmans, 1910), p. 236.

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, p. 10.

women in the Victorian period. Providing ‘middle-aged spinsters’ who had ‘empty hours’, and ‘younger women with greater aspirations’ with occupations, however humble, implied that they had contributions to make to society.<sup>6</sup> Women could become nurses, teachers, or managers of a community through their vocation. Before legal changes emancipated women, the Society of St Margaret provided them with opportunities other than marriage and childbearing.

This book was completed during the Covid-19 pandemic. This background echoes the conditions in which some of the Sisters served. Sister Amy, formerly Emily Scobell, ‘the belle of Lewes races and assize balls’ succumbed to scarlet fever whilst nursing, at her own insistence, and died in 1857.<sup>7</sup> Other Sisters nursed cases of consumption or diphtheria at the homes of the poor, and often in ‘accommodation which a well-cared-for pig would have regarded as totally inadequate’.<sup>8</sup> At the outbreak of the First World War, Mother Ermenild (third daughter of the Founder, John Mason Neale) offered the Convent Infirmary to the Red Cross. Normally 15 were accommodated there, but the Sisters were asked to house 150 in those dark days.<sup>9</sup>

Other books which have outlined the history of the Society of St Margaret and the Convent include the pamphlet *Doing the Impossible*, written by one of the Sisters. The title is based on the saying by John Mason Neale that ‘what is possible *may* be done, what is impossible *must* be done.’ Peter F. Anson in *The Call of the Cloister* devoted a detailed chapter to the Society of St Margaret.<sup>10</sup> In *Convent Memories*, Sylvia Spencer described periods of her childhood spent at the Convent because of her parents’ chaotic finances.<sup>11</sup> Dr Ferry’s book now provides a comprehensive account of the Sisterhood and how it has changed over time.

Supporters of Sackville College will be particularly interested in the chapters covering the foundation by John Mason Neale in 1854, until his death in 1866. There is also a lovely glimpse of his daughter, Katherine Ermenild, who joined the Society after her father’s death and became its Mother Superior from 1902-1932. Dealing with the billeting of 150 men at the Convent Infirmary in 1914, Mother Ermenild was described as ‘calmly and humorously dealing with the changing situations and being ready for anything’ and displaying characteristics of her late father in ‘the total absence of any affectation, the tremendous care for every individual, the humour, vigour and deep affection’.<sup>12</sup>

This book is of interest to the present residents of the Old Convent and to anyone with a connection to the Convent: Sisters who were professed and served there, former pupils,

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<sup>6</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> Peter F. Anson, *The Call of the Cloister*, (London: SPCK, 1955), pp. 333-357.

<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Spencer, *Convent Memories* (Sussex: Book Guild, 1997).

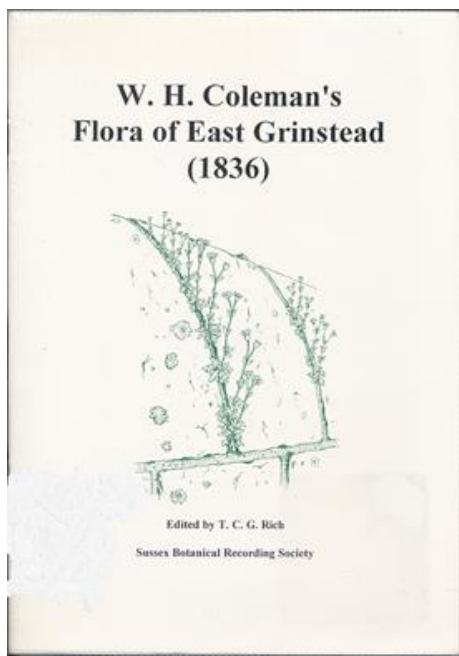
<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Ferry, *The Old Convent*, pp. 124-25.

orphans, teachers, those who worked in the laundry or gardens, as well as visiting craftsmen and builders. The book is also of value to those interested in embroidery and needlework, Victorian architecture, Victorian churchmen, the role of women in the church and society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and those generally interested in the history of East Grinstead. Dr Ferry's book is a definitive history of this unique Sisterhood and all aspects of its life, and she has dedicated it to the women who gave their lives to it.

The book is available to buy from The Bookshop, East Grinstead and the Town Museum, or via <https://oldconvent1865.com/>

### Flora of East Grinstead by W.H. Coleman 1836.

Michael Leppard wrote about this book in *Bulletin* 55, Autumn 1994, on page 7.



The book was compiled whilst William Higgins Coleman (c. 1816-63) was staying at Saint Hill, apparently as a private tutor to the Crawfurd family. It was included in 1907 in *Flora of Sussex* edited by F.H. Arnold. Michael Leppard described W.H. Coleman as 'an important field worker and botanical cataloguer'. The 1994 edition was edited by T.C.G Rich and published by the Sussex Botanical Recording Society.

Michael Leppard clearly enjoyed reviewing this book. Although he was not so interested in the plants, he was delighted by the descriptions of topography, such as 'the dam where the water is turned off to supply Brambletye Mill', the place names included and how they were expressed, such as 'on Ashdown Forest' and explanations of local names, such as Gargle Wood, Gargle Field and Gargle Wood Field. 'Gargle' could also be 'Gaggle' or 'Gaghl', and the name came from the bog myrtle or gale which grew there.

Copies of the 1994 edition can be found for sale at prices ranging from £10 to £72. East Grinstead Library has a copy for borrowing. However, there is apparently one delicate copy of the manuscript at the library at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. A descendant of the Crawfurd family who employed Coleman as tutor is Mr Arthur Crawfurd, and he found an 1836 printed copy belonging to his Crawfurd cousin. Mr Crawfurd described the book as bound in green cloth with a green leather spine, and a green leather label bearing the title embossed in gold lettering. The title page is dated London 1836, with a preface signed W.H.C. and dated October 25 1836. Printed on a flyleaf at the back of the book is 'W. Metcalfe, Printer, Cambridge'. Coleman in a preamble entitled 'Stations of Plants in the vicinity of East Grinstead' referred to 'this catalogue being intended for the use of the residents at Saint Hill'.

Mr Crawfurd has concluded that the book was a gift to the family and that Coleman, who was only twenty years old, could only afford to have one copy printed.

Michael Leppard wrote [1 October 2017] to congratulate Mr Crawfurd on discovering ‘a unique book of such particular interest’ and commented ‘What a lovely gift it was, too, surely telling us something of the relationship between Coleman and the Crawfords and the character of the man himself’. Michael intended to write about the book in a future *Bulletin*, so it is a privilege for me to do so now. Thank you to Mr Crawfurd for his generosity in sharing the information.

## More on Carved Portrait Heads Around East Grinstead

By Robin Whalley

In 2009 Michael Leppard, in the East Grinstead Museum’s “Compass No 28”, wrote an article about several carved wooden portrait heads that can be seen around East Grinstead, particularly the prominent carved portraits in the Dining Hall at Sackville College. In the article he suggests that these portraits may well be mid 19<sup>th</sup> century attachments carved locally and added during the restoration by Rev John Mason Neale, rather than as previously assumed, mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. The V & A’s Assistant Keeper in the Department of Furniture and Woodwork had identified these as such in 1972. Michael referred to a personal communication with Mrs K S Coutin that “16<sup>th</sup> century carvers did not do heads in profile”, as the rationale for reaching his conclusion.

However, Michael went on to ask a number of questions challenging other researchers to clarify this conundrum (see Compass article reprinted below) and add to our collective knowledge.

So I have taken up Michael’s challenge below, but fear I have only added to the controversy.....

## CARVED PORTRAIT-HEADS AROUND EAST GRINSTEAD M.J. Leppard

The carved portrait-heads at Sackville College depicted on the cover of this *Compass* are not unparalleled locally; there are comparable heads at 22-24 High Street (the Bookshop) and the Guest House (the public library) at Lingfield. All are circular medallions, showing head and shoulders in profile, with a vaguely Renaissance/16th century appearance, and of oak. The one at the Bookshop (dated 1535 over the entrance but actually mid-15th century), has been asserted to be Anne Boleyn, beheaded 1536, or her sister Mary<sup>1</sup>; their family home was not far away at Hever. The pair at the College (founded in 1609) was judged by Dr Wheatley to be 'likely from the Sackville family home at Buckhurst'<sup>2</sup>, from the demolition of which it has long been plausibly claimed that some of the stonework of the College was derived. I do not know any attribution of the ones in Lingfield library, built c.1475 but adapted within, not entirely authentically, at the end of the 19th century.

They also have in common a lack of any evidence for these identifications and a much later date than claimed; 16th century carvers did not do heads in profile.<sup>3</sup> Moreover they sit awkwardly, as if later attachments rather than integral to the original decor. I tentatively suggest that they are all late-19th/early 20th century products, supplied, perhaps even commissioned, to augment the appropriateness of the 'restorations' undertaken around that time. The Bookshop gained its first-floor idiosyncratic cork-oak bark facing and a good deal of not always well-fitting panelling under John Tooth in c.1880. Following Sackville College's major restoration in the mid-19th century by William Butterfield for J.M. Neale (who chose ecclesiastical subjects for his interventions), it underwent further antiquarianising under his successors around the end of the century. The architect C. Forster Hayward acquired the Guest House in 1896 and restored it in 1898.<sup>4</sup>

If there is a common local source for these medallions I suggest it is Miss Barr and her pupils at the East Grinstead School of Arts, of which I gave some account, spanning 1909-18, in *Compass* 23. They were certainly responsible for major wood-carving commissions in East Grinstead and Dormans Land churches<sup>5</sup> and it is perfectly possible that some of the pupils found willing homes for their efforts at portrait heads, rather as in the 1930s the shields of arms carved by Boy Scouts were accommodated on the ends of the seats in East Grinstead parish church.<sup>6</sup>

At Gravetye there are two far more sophisticated heads over the fireplace in the former master bedroom, claimed to represent Roger and Katherine Infield<sup>7</sup>, for whom the house was built in c.1600 and whose initials are carved in the stone spandrels of the building's garden entrance. Though they are full-face and not in medallions, they look like modern people in a costume drama and seem to have been put in so as not to leave blank the round-headed panels they occupy. William Robinson, who bought Gravetye in 1885, 'panelled the interior ... in wood from the estate and enriched the rooms with chimney-pieces and fireplace furnishings entirely in keeping'<sup>8</sup> (which is not the same as saying authentic features brought in from other houses of the same date).

All this amounts to, however, is three instances of similar medallions, two confidently-executed portraits and some guesses flimsily supported by known facts that may or may not be relevant. What is needed now is that other people (the more the better) try to answer the following questions. Are there any other similar heads locally, and, if so, where? Are such heads in fact a regional or national phenomenon? Are the similarities strong enough to suggest a common origin? Can they be related to known two-dimensional images? Were any intended to be particular historical characters? How accurately are the costumes portrayed? When, where and by whom were they made? All information sent in will be printed.

<sup>1</sup> c.g. *E.G. Courier*, 3 Sept. 1981   <sup>2</sup> his caption to his drawing   <sup>3</sup> Mrs K.S. Coutin, personal communication   <sup>4</sup> A.B. Hayward and S. Hazell, *A History of Lingfield* (1933), p.33   <sup>5</sup> *E.G. Museum Compass*, 23 (Summer 2007), p.7   <sup>6</sup> G. Golding-Bird, *E.G. and its Parish Church* (3rd ed., 1934), p.1   <sup>7</sup> e.g. *E.G. Observer*, 30 Jan. 1989   <sup>8</sup> as note 7

The carved portrait heads in the Dining Hall at Sackville College, mainly in profile...



Portraits on the reredos at the east end of  
the Dining Hall

Portraits either side of the fireplace in the  
Dining Hall

By searching the internet it is easy enough to come up with many examples, particularly of 16<sup>th</sup> century carved heads looking similar to those in the Dining Hall as below.



These are “Romayne” panels and the name applies to a style of decorative carving introduced into England from Italy in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, featuring portrait heads or busts set in medallions. The name was coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is a derivative of “Roman”. What is striking with these examples is the vertical symmetry, whereas for the Sackville portraits, the bottom of each appears to have been cut off, suggesting they may have come from elsewhere. There is also clear evidence of the panels being let into the surrounding panelling, lending weight to Mr Leppard’s theory of a later addition, perhaps during Neale’s restoration work. However that does not preclude their coming from a Sackville House in the High Street as the rest of the panelling in the Dining Room. That there are many other examples of 16<sup>th</sup> century Romayne heads in profile tends to negate Mrs Coutin’s assumption!



*Anne Boleyn's head in the Bookshop*

Interestingly, the head in the panelling of the High Street Bookshop, purporting to be that of Anne Boleyn, has not been formally dated but the Bookshop structure is mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. This head is also in profile so adding to the mystery!

I sought a further opinion from the “Curator, Furniture and Woodwork 1300-1700” at the V & A Museum regarding the main Dining Hall Panels and his response is as follows:

*“Stylistically -and as far as I can see from the photos, physically – your carved oak panels are quite in keeping with English work c1520-40, but that doesn’t mean they cannot be competent 19c replicas, added to enhance a renovation (one would probably need to examine them to be confident on that point). As you say, they do appear to have been trimmed and inserted into fixed woodwork, which might suggest 16c panels reused (panels of this kind may well have been available at the time of the 19c renovations you mention)”.*

There are also two lesser-known and much overlooked carved heads at either side of the door in the entranceway to the College, which look very old indeed, one of which is in profile and one full-face.



I have also asked the V & A for a view on these medallions as these could well be originals put in place at the time of the original building of the College in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century? An update in the next *Bulletin*!