



# CNHSS Bulletin

Issue 142, September 2011

Bulletin of the  
Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society

ISSN 0309-6149

*In this issue:*

Croydon Archaeology in the 1960s Obituary	Peter Drewett
John Bannister Gent	Paul W. Sowan
News and Notices	—
Death of Ken Newbury	Paul W. Sowan
In and around the Merstham Gap	John Hayward
A railway oddity at Park Hill, Croydon	Paul W Sowan
Alfred Rhodes Bristow – a Greenwich man with Croydon connections	John B Greig

Editor: John B Greig, 62 Boundary Road, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 4AD

Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society Limited

A company limited by guarantee registered in London No. 922278

Registered Office: 96a Brighton Road, South Croydon, CR2 6AD

Registered charity No. 260739

---

## Croydon Archaeology in the 1960s

---

As I climbed up the dark stairs of Eldon House, the Society's headquarters since 1940, I wondered what to expect at my first meeting of the Archaeology Section of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society. The attic room smelt of old wood and at the back was a brass magic lantern projector. It was 20th October, 1959, and the lecture was on Roman Pottery. I was considerably younger than anyone else in the room. I was immediately taken in hand and welcomed by Muriel Shaw who introduced me to Dr S.B. Hamilton the Society's President and to the Section's Secretary Mr S. Ingrams who, I think, did not quite know what to make of this young schoolboy. So began my ten years close involvement with the Society which spanned the 1960s and was a major influence on the development of my career in professional archaeology.

Unfortunately I had just missed the Society's first excavation into the medieval origins of Croydon. Mr Ingrams had completed the excavation of the site of the Croydon Parish Church Hall in Old Town revealing an occupation sequence from the 11th century to the 19th century. I remember seeing his prized discovery, a single sherd of 11th century red painted Pingsdorf type pottery, the first sherd of Late Saxon pottery from Old Town. There was little further development in Old Town during the first half of the 1960s so, although I regularly attended the Archaeology Section meetings, I went off around southern England to learn the craft of excavation on sites like Fyfield Down in Wiltshire, Bardown in Sussex and culminating at the massive excavation of the line of a road through Durrington Walls, the neolithic henge in Wiltshire.

By 1967 Muriel Shaw was President of the Society and Lilian Thornhill was secretary of the archaeology section so, when a new ring road was proposed just west of the parish church, the three of us decided something had to be done. So began a series of small rescue excavations directed firstly by me in Rectory Grove and in the former courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace and then progressed by Lilian Thornhill and Keith Ray in the early 1970s. No professional archaeologists would have touched these sites at the time but we felt that a key part of our knowledge of Croydon would be lost if nothing was done. By the mid 1970's small town archaeology was commonplace in professional archaeology. In fact I was really more interested in prehistoric archaeology than small medieval towns so when Lilian (who had just completed the London University Extra Mural Diploma in Archaeology) suggested that we run a training excavation to train a core

of volunteers to help on the Old Town excavations I suggested Croham Hurst where in 1962 I had collected mesolithic flints.

The Croham Hurst project left more questions unanswered than answered. We started by sectioning two of George Clinch's 'Neolithic pit dwellings' and confirmed what geologists knew already, that these were natural hollows. We then examined two of five curious banked enclosures we had found on the Hurst. One we excavated completely and found an oval of six postholes within the bank. Although loosely associated with mesolithic flints, a pit found under the bank produced a carbon14 date of AD850±95 so clearly the bank postdated the 9th century AD. What we found remains a mystery but I suspect these may have been medieval charcoal burners' shelters. The field courses we ran on Croham Hurst did however produce an excellent team who worked on a number of Old Town rescue excavations.<sup>1</sup>

We started our excavations in Rectory Grove in December 1968 working on through at weekends until February 1969, not the best time of year to dig. The main result of the excavation was to produce a pottery sequence from the 10th century AD to the present day. Although some of the grass-tempered ware may have been earlier, our earliest well-dated sherd was of Late Saxon St.Neots ware (in 1968 the first such sherd found south of the Thames). The St.Neots sherd confirmed Late Saxon occupation in Old Town Croydon suggested by the Pingsdorf ware found by Mr Ingrams. Excavations across the road in what was the courtyard of the archiepiscopal palace pushed our Saxon dates back even further with the finding of a body sherd from a middle Saxon grass-tempered globular pot associated with a loom weight.<sup>2</sup>

On 1st January 1970 I got my first professional job in archaeology working for the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. It was that first visit to the CNHSS at Eldon House in 1959 to be met by the enthusiasm of Muriel Shaw, later to be joined by the ever-energetic Lilian Thornhill, that led me into a forty year career in archaeology.

**Peter Drewett**

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Drewett, P.L. (1970). The excavation of a turf-walled structure and other fieldwork on Croham Hurst, Croydon, Surrey, 1968/9. *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, **67**, 1-19.
- <sup>2</sup> Drewett, P.L. (1974). Excavations in Old Town Croydon, 1968/70: A Middle Saxon to Post-Medieval Occupation sequence. *Research Volume of the Surrey Archaeological Society*, **1**, 1-45.

---

## Obituary

---

### **John Bannister GENT [1932 – 2011]**

John Gent died at Croydon University Hospital during the night of 2nd / 3rd May this year, in his 80th year. He joined this society in 1959 and served three terms as our President (1971 – 73, 1989 – 91, and 1999 – 2000), earning the name 'Mr Croydon' as a result of his 17 or so books devoted to the history of the town. A previous 'Mr Croydon' was also one of our members, namely John Corbet Anderson [1827 - 1907], another prodigious chronicler and illustrator of the town's history. John was elected an Honorary Member in 1983. He was our longest standing member, that distinction now being shared by Peter Drewett and Paul Sowen who both joined in 1960.

John was born on 17 March 1932, and educated at Cypress Road Juniors and Selhurst Grammar School for Boys (1942 – 50). His form master at Selhurst for his first three years at the school, and also his history teacher, was Kenneth Malcolm King [died 1976], to whom John attributed his enthusiasm for local history. He possibly already knew of the Society during the 1930s as his father, William Frederick Gent, was an active member of our then Aquarists' Section at that time. Joining the Society was prompted by a series of local history articles by Kenneth Ryde (then Croydon's Chief Reference Librarian) published in the Croydon Advertiser.

After National Service with the Royal Air Force (he had been in the Air Training Corps at school) he commenced his 38 years career with London Transport, becoming in due course a senior executive with experience of bus and underground trains management, and planning for, amongst other things, Croydon Tramlink and West Croydon's bus station. In this capacity he had professional contacts with Croydon's senior politicians and officers, and was sufficiently well-known and respected by the establishment to be invited to contribute materials for at least one edition (ca 1992) of the Borough's Official Guide, and to the local council's publications Croydon Reports, later Your Croydon.

He served for some while as our Local History Secretary and became a member of the Society's Council in 1966, soon thereafter taking part in planning the celebration of our centenary in 1970. His first book, co-authored with other members, Croydon: the story of a hundred years, was published that year and reviewed changes in Croydon during the Society's lifetime. Despite some members of the Society's Council fearing

this venture would bankrupt us, the first edition sold out, and a second was ordered, before the printers' bill arrived! This was the first of nine books in our illustrated local histories series. He was able to see a copy of the final title *A view of Croydon: postcards from the past* a few days before he died. The inspiration for the books was an earlier series published in the 1950s and 1960s by Reece Winstone devoted to the 19th / 20th century history of Bristol. The first book in our series originated as a series of articles by members (John himself and Austen Clarke, Ron Cox, G.M. Davies, Muriel Huitson, Betty Smither, Lilian Thornhill and Tony Walker) published in a short-lived magazine *Croydon Town and Around*. These were provided without charge to the publishers, on the understanding that the type would be kept standing and all the articles would in due course be published as a separate work. Over the years, John's nine books published by us, and a further eight published by others, went through 31 editions. He very generously allowed the Society to retain all profits on all our nine titles.

Having collected postcards since childhood, John amassed a unique collection of some thousands of local views (he had over 5000 by 1980) ownership of which is expected to pass to the Society on the understanding that they will be placed on long-term loan with Croydon's Local Studies & Archives Service. A number of selected postcards from John's collection have been reprinted by the Society over the years, and some were used to illustrate his several books.

John travelled widely within and beyond Europe, and on one occasion visited Calcutta on behalf of London Transport to advise on public transport operation in that city.

He was a member of numerous societies and, especially, the first Chairman of the Croydon Society established in 1975. Sadly that body, established by us to act as a civic amenity society for Croydon, was wound up in 2007 as a result of a lack of members willing to serve as officers. Years earlier, he had been an active member of the unsuccessful campaign to save the former Grand Theatre from closure: the final production was in 1959. Later, he served as one of the honorary Corps of Ushers at the Fairfield Halls.

In his final 12 years John's friend Michael Noone lived with and cared for him, making continued residence at home possible. He was very fond of his garden created by him from 1972 onwards. His ashes are now buried there.

John's funeral was at Shirley Methodist Church on 24 May 2011, with few if any seats unoccupied. Relatives from the west country and Ireland, friends from Denmark, a large number of past and present London Transport personnel, and representatives from the many societies of which John had been a member attended. A vintage Routemaster bus was provided for the occasion with a personalised destination blind lettered as follows:

68

JOHN GENT

Service before self

1932 - 2011

SOUTH CROYDON

Blenheim Park Road

This conveyed mourners to and from the church and John's home in South Croydon. It was a route 68 bus that John took from his home in Whitehorse Lane to and from school at Selhurst.

The assistance of Graham Donaldson, Derek Keeler, Michael Noone, and Richard Norman in compiling this obituary is gratefully acknowledged. It is expected that a fuller memoir, including a bibliography of John's published work, will appear in a forthcoming issue of our Proceedings.

**Paul W Sowan**

---

## **News and Notices**

---

### ***From the Membership Secretary***

**Subscriptions are due on 1 January 2012**

**Subscriptions for 2012 are £15 for Ordinary Members and £9 for Associate Members**

In the six months covered by the current CNHSS events programme, you could have attended 41 walks, talks and excursions, as well as receiving the biannual Bulletin and occasional Proceedings.

Although all of us listed on the back of the programme are volunteers and give our time, running our Society costs money. The cost of room hire, printing the Programme, Bulletin and Proceedings, postage, and maintaining the Library and Museum continue to increase. The last

increase in subscriptions was in 2004, and membership remains great value for money.

Please pay your 2012 subscription by cheque to the Membership Secretary, Jane McLauchlin at CNHSS, 96A Brighton Road, South Croydon CR2 6AD. If you pay by Standing Order, please remember to amend it before it is paid on or soon after 1 January.

For your convenience, a loose reminder slip is enclosed with this Bulletin. Prompt payment helps the Society's cash flow, and I would appreciate spending less time issuing reminders - as I write (in August), I am still awaiting 41 subscriptions for 2011. You know who you are and there is another reminder with this mailing!

### ***Honorary Members***

The society's constitution provides for the election of a maximum at any one time of ten honorary members, being persons who have made particularly significant contributions to the management and operation of the Society, or to the advancement of its objects, or both. Following the death on 2/3 May 2011 of honorary member John Bannister Gent, by which a vacancy was created, your Council have elected Ronald Brooker and Roger Packham to honorary membership.

### ***Members' recent research and publications***

A number of our members at any one time are actively pursuing researches of various kinds, and their endeavours often result in publication, from short notes to full length books.

Foremost, notably, is the late John Gent, whose last book, *A view of Croydon: postcards from the past*, arrived from the printers just days before he died. This is the last of his series of nine illustrated local history books on Croydon published by the Society.

We congratulate our President, Celia Bailey, on her University of Surrey dissertation on *The housing question in Croydon*, which deals with the early years of council housing in the Borough.

Ron Williams, a former Geology Section Secretary, has to his credit a hardback volume *Rudolph Glossop and the rise of geotechnology: selected journals, diaries and letters*, published in 2011.

Also, new member Pam Buttrey's book *Cane Hill Hospital: the Tower on the Hill*, has recently been published.

Former President Ted Frith has deposited copies of his four-volume history of Selsdon (not a formally published document) in our own Library,

and in Croydon's Local Studies Library. The history extends from the earliest records to 1951 and is entitled *Honeymoon village or nowhere town? The story of an outer London suburb*.

### ***Retirement of Christine Corner as Local Studies Librarian, Croydon Local Studies and Archives Service***

As a result of central and local government spending cuts and, in Croydon, massive reductions in staffing in the Arts & Heritage Service, Christine Corner opted for early retirement / voluntary redundancy with effect from 31 March 2011. She had served in the Local Studies & Archives Department for 14 years, and previously to that on the staff of Croydon Public Libraries. The Society was represented at an informal celebration of her career and services to local history in Croydon on 30 March. Christine's book *The changing face of Croydon* was published in the Britain in old photographs series, published jointly by the Local Studies Library and Sutton Publishing Ltd in 1999.

### ***The Brian Hope-Taylor archive***

The late Brian Hope-Taylor (1923-2001), once a Sanderstead resident, was an active member of the Surrey Archaeological Society in the 1940s and 1950s. He conducted several excavations in and around Croydon. And he took charge of the residue of local archaeological material abandoned in World War II by the then County Borough of Croydon at its Museum at Grangewood Mansion (now demolished) at Thornton Heath. He died in 2001, and a quantity of material was found in his house and garage. This is now held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland at Edinburgh. There is an English Heritage report at <http://lmid1a.rcahms.gov.uk/bhtreport.pdf>.

A number of the sites he excavated were published either as preliminary reports only, or not at all.

Rose Hooker, of the Surrey Archaeological Society, has visited the archive at Edinburgh, and has published a short report in that Society's Bulletin. Of immediate interest for Croydon is the material relating to the Croham Hurst Bronze Age barrow (a Scheduled Ancient Monument), the Croham Hurst Place Romano-British village, and the Farthing Down Anglo-Saxon cemetery. Other east Surrey sites represented include a medieval pottery kiln at Limpsfield Vicars Haw, the Preston Hawe medieval manor, a Romano-British village at Star Lane at Hooley, the War Coppice camp, and a flint mine at Crewes Avenue at Warringham.

Rose HOOKER, 2009, *The Brian Hope-Taylor archive*. *Bulletin of the Surrey Archaeological Society*, **416**, 8 – 10.

### ***Newscuttings files at Croydon's Local Studies & Archives on Level 3 at the Clocktower***

Our member Heather Salter is doing splendid work filing newscuttings at the Borough's Local Studies & Archives (LS&A) on Level 3 at the Clocktower Complex, entered via the Central Library. She wonders if one or two other members might also be willing to devote an hour or two each week to assisting with this important albeit unexciting chore. Any such willing volunteers are invited to contact Paul Sowan or LSA staff.

Many of these cuttings, dating from the 1960s onwards, were collected by Society members Ruth Dixon, Doris Hobbs, Muriel Huitson, Muriel Shaw, Lilian Thornhill and Paul Sowan. The Society's own library retains cuttings relating particularly to our members' interests, such as archaeology, botany, geology, Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, as well as to our own more prominent members.

More general interest cuttings are deposited in LS&A where they are more accessible to the general public. The three major series of cuttings, all in alphabetical and date order, relate to Croydon people, Croydon roads, and Croydon schools (state sector and private). But smaller collections deal with anything from commercial firms to buses and trains, hospitals, hotels, public open spaces and voluntary organisations (to specify but a selection). Areas under-represented are the arts and sport, otherwise the coverage is very comprehensive. In the biographical files, persons accused or convicted of criminal offences are not (unless dead or very high profile) filed by name, but newscuttings relating to them can be found under victims' names, scenes of crimes, roads they lived in, or in the police files (sorted by date).

---

## **Death of Ken Newbury**

---

Kenneth Marcus George Newbury [1912 – 2011], a co-founder of the Bourne Society and originator of that Society's name, died at a retirement home in Chichester earlier this year. He was born in Watford on 11 October 1912, and was educated and commenced his career in librarianship in that town.

As an active member of the Bourne Society and as Chief Librarian for the Coulsdon and Purley District Council from 1950 and (from 1963) Deputy Chief Librarian for the London Borough of Croydon, Ken Newbury was a very significant figure in local history in east Surrey. He moved to Chichester on his retirement in 1973, and was equally active in local history at that place. Two editions of his history of the river Lavant, which flows through the city (or under it in culvert), were published in 1987 and 2000. He compiled detailed indexes to the publications of the Bourne Society and, in 1973, collaborated with Peter Glover in the publication of a set of reproductions of historic views of Croydon painted between 1805 and 1924 selected from Croydon's seldom-seen art collection.

NEWBURY, K.M.G., and A. Peter GLOVER, 1973, *Ten views of Croydon 1805 - 1924, with notes*. LB Croydon Libraries Department: 1p + 10 illustrations + 10pp descriptive text [ISBN 0-903712-00-8]

NEWBURY, Kenneth Marcus George [1912 - 2011], 2011, Obituary [by Dorothy Tutt]. *Bourne Society Local History Records* **68**, 56 – 57 [Co-founder with Charles Silverthorne and Geoffrey Spence on the Bourne Society in 1956]

**Paul W Sowan**

---

## **In and around the Merstham Gap**

---

A walk, led by Paul Sowan on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011, started from Merstham station.

Paul explained that the first railway through the Merstham Gap was the Croydon, Merstham & Godstone Railway (CM&GR) - an extension to the horse-drawn Surrey Iron Railway. It opened in 1805 and eventually closed in 1838 to be replaced in part by the London and Brighton Railway (L&BR) line which opened on 1st December 1841. From 1842, the station was also used by South Eastern Railway (SER) and was the point at which travellers between the two railways exchanged trains. The original station was located  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile south of the current station.

The section of line between Coulsdon and Redhill was later transferred to SER ownership, and the new owners decided to close Merstham station on 1st October 1843, thereby forcing passengers wishing to change trains to walk between the two stations at Redhill. This was a tactic to force the L&BR to share the new SER Reigate station at Redhill. Once the L&BR

had given way and closed their existing station at Reigate Road, Redhill, the SER opened a new station at Merstham on the present site on 4th October 1844. The up side booking office (badly damaged by fire in the late 1980s and later rebuilt) and footbridge date from a 1905 rebuilding.

The difficulties encountered by the LB&SCR (successor to the L&BR) with the SER at Redhill resulted in the LB&SCR building the third railway line through the Merstham Gap, now known as the Quarry Line. This bypasses Redhill and opened on 8th November, 1899.

We walked into the centre of the village and stopped in the main road opposite The Feathers Hotel. Here, we were shown where a short stretch of the CM & GR track (not on the original route) was originally displayed. Sadly, the plate rails were stolen some time ago. I found out later that, apparently, other pieces of the track were 'rescued' by a concerned local and are in safe keeping but, in the circumstances, it seems sensible not to put them back on display at present. Only the six stone sleepers, embedded in the pavement, remain opposite the hotel.

Paul told us that further stone sleepers and plate rails on a reconstructed length of track were displayed (again, not on the original line) on British Rail land near the Jolliffe Arms at the top of Merstham Hill, next to the London Road (A23), but these were also stolen in the 1970s. I subsequently discovered that these plates had originally been placed on permanent loan to the Surrey County Council by the Merstham Lime Co. Ltd., and Merstham Manor Ltd. Presumably, they had been found in the limeworks. According to a report earlier this month by Jim Cole, who now lives in Corwen Conwy in Wales, "there were about 12 pieces of rail set on square stone sleepers. Over a period of many months every bit of flanged rail was successively stolen. Apparently they are much sort after by railway enthusiasts the world over. The notice board is still there, now extremely dilapidated overgrown and illegible, but perhaps the stone sleepers still remain hidden in the long grass".

Fortunately, a number of stone sleepers and 23 of the three-foot long cast iron 'tram plates' or rails of and/or similar to those of the CM&GR, survive. Paul explained that they were recovered at the time of the construction of the M23 motorway and are now on display in the Reigate Caves in Tunnel Road, Reigate. They had been stored in Croydon for some decades, before which they had formed part of a tramway system in the underground quarries at Godstone. The 'caves' are now the property of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council. Paul explained that it is possible to view these rails as the caves are currently operated under licence as a low-key public visitor attraction by Wealden Cave and Mine Society

(WCMS). There are four public 'cave days' each year; and on these days WCMS conduct guided public tours (for which a charge is made) of the two sets of 'caves' on the east and west sides of Tunnel Road, and also of the Baron's Cave in the Castle grounds. Two iron tram plates, along with four stone sleeper blocks, are also on long-term loan from the CNHSS to the Amberley Working Museum.

The walk continued up Quality Street which originally formed part of the main road to London until it was diverted to its present location. The street gets its present name from two then well-known actors Seymour Hicks and his wife Ellaline Terriss who performed in J.M. Barrie's comedy 'Quality Street'. After a first short run in New York in 1901 the play opened in London in 1902 and ran for a very successful 459 performances starring Hicks and Terriss. When they moved to The Old Forge in the street, by then a cul-de-sac, the street was renamed Quality Street in their honour.

We strolled up the street which has several listed buildings on either side including a converted almshouse dating from 1815. The street ends at some gates with the road continuing as a private drive leading to a small private estate but which originally led to Merstham House. This was the seat of the Jolliffe family (Lord Hylton) until 1899. It was let until the 2nd World War, when it was occupied by the Canadian forces. It was pulled down in the 1950s and the M25 was built through the grounds in the late 1970s. The drive now leads to the Glade House which was built in 1935.

As we were standing outside The Old Forge, which is reputed to be the oldest house in Merstham, the owner came out and invited us to view the interior of the hall and main room. He told us that the building dates from the 15th century and has no foundations, like many buildings of that period. He is now having structural problems which he thinks might be as result of the effects of the nearby M25.

We continued our walk along a footpath which crosses high above the very busy and noisy M25 by a pedestrian bridge. On the other side, Paul pointed out the remains of a mill pond. The mill had been demolished many years ago and the remainder of the mill pond was destroyed by the M25 construction work. We continued along the path and crossed a road before climbing a steep path leading up to the Early English village church dedicated to St. Katharine of Alexandria which stands on an isolated knoll north of the village. It dates back to about 1220 and is constructed almost entirely of the greyish-green Merstham stone. The church contains a Sussex marble font, dating from c1150, which has

survived from an earlier church on this site. Currently, the tower is surrounded by scaffolding for a £300,000 restoration scheme.

Paul spent some time commenting about the properties of Merstham stone which does not weather too well, although he has viewed some that survives in very good condition inside St.Paul's Cathedral. In the graveyard he showed us Henry Hoof's tombstone. One author had embellished his death by describing how this gentleman had been killed during the construction of the Merstham tunnel and how he had met his end when the tunnel workings encountered a fault causing flooding. However, Paul disputed this by stating that the fault was geologically impossible and Henry Hoof's death certificate revealed that he had died in his bed! He said that he had written to the author asking for the source of his information but never received a reply!

I had to leave the tour at this point but the rest of the party started to climb up a steep escarpment onto the North Downs.

**John Hayward**

## **A railway oddity at Park Hill, Croydon**

Here is a frank statement of ignorance and plea for members' thoughts on an odd feature of the railway cutting through Park Hill between East and South Croydon Stations. The western fence line is as to be expected a more or less straight line. The eastern boundary is not. It features an embayment, deviating to include an apparently more than necessary part of the adjoining Park Hill, formerly the deer park of the Archbishops of Canterbury at Croydon Palace and, since 1887 a public park. The curious eastern railway boundary is sufficiently pronounced to be shown on modern street maps, and on the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 sheet. It is not a modern feature. It appears on W. Roberts' 1847 plan of the Parish of Croydon, surveyed within six years of the opening of the original two-track main Brighton line, and may thus be an original feature of the Park Hill cutting as first made. However, as the base of the embayment does not extend down to rail level, this curious feature seems not to be a 'side-cutting' or in modern terms 'borrow pit' made as a source of material (additional to that from the cutting itself) required to build embankments further down the line. A very late 1830s or very early 1840s painting of the cutting during the course of its construction shows a view southwards to the brick arch precursor to what is now the Coombe Road bridge (reproduced in John Gent's Croydon transport through the ages, page 18). The cutting here is made through Thanet Sand, and was evidently at

this point being dug from south to north, the prodigious quantity of sand being taken away southwards by rail, presumably to build the long embankments beyond Croham Land all the way to Purley. Had more sand than that yielded by the cutting itself, a 'side cutting; or 'borrow pit' might have provided it.

The London & Brighton Railway was opened here in 1841. Southwards from East Croydon Station (at the time the Croydon (LBR) station of course) the line was at first of only two tracks formed through the Park Hill Cutting, as far south as what is now the Coombe Road overbridge. When, later, the line was widened to four and then five tracks this was achieved without additional land-take. The width of railway land between the fence lines was more fully utilised by replacing sloping cutting side with near-vertical brick retaining walls. The late 1830s fence-lines appear to be in 2011 exactly as they were when the line opened in 1841. That on the west side of the cutting is as would be expected a more or less straight line. That on the east side features the substantial incursion into the grounds of Park Hill as noted above. I would welcome members' thoughts on why a straight line was not taken.

Bob Carr of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society has suggested the embayment may reflect a pre-existing natural or geological feature. Although large closed circular depressions are known on the Thanet Sand outcrop (presumably formed by solution of the underlying chalk by percolating rainwater: there are spectacular ones in Addington Hills and in the Royal Russel School's grounds easily seen from the public open space at Coombe Wood) this seems to be an unlikely explanation for this particular feature.

**Paul W Sowan**

---

## **Alfred Rhodes Bristow – a Greenwich man with Croydon connections**

---

Alfred Rhodes BRISTOW, the son of Isaac Bristow draper of Turnpin Lane, Greenwich and his wife Henrietta Caroline, was christened in the parish church of St Alphage, Greenwich, Kent on January 24th, 1819. He had been born on December 20th, though the year is not specified.<sup>1</sup> His marriage took place on June 16th 1842 in Croydon parish church to Margaret Oswald, at this time he is described as an attorney resident in the parish of St Alphage, Greenwich.<sup>2</sup> Margaret was the daughter of a

John Oswald but her residence was given only as Croydon. However, a separate note of the marriage describes her as the eldest daughter of John Oswald of The Palace, Croydon.<sup>3</sup>

Margaret does not appear in the Oswald family tree that Lilian Thornhill appended to her article 'From Palace to Washhouse',<sup>4</sup> but this is not surprising, Lilian used the 1851 census return as a major source of information about the family and at that time Alfred and Margaret would have been living in Greenwich. It is probable that the Bristow and Oswald families were acquainted before the Oswalds moved to Croydon as Margaret was born to John Oswald's first wife on December 8th, 1816 and was christened in Deptford on January 1st, 1817; her elder brothers William Drummond and John were also christened there.<sup>5</sup>

A Mr Bristow, solicitor of Bristow and Tarrant of London, appears in Croydon history as acting for Starey and Oswald in the matter of the removal of the Mill dam. This process was summarised by Richard Savage in an article on the Croydon Local Board of Health,<sup>6</sup> and was also considered by Lilian Thornhill.<sup>4</sup> Despite the many occasions that the Board of Health minutes record business with Bristow and Tarrant between January 15th 1850 and May 18th 1852 there are none when Mr Bristow's initials are noted. The only additional information about him that is relevant is that '...Mr Bristow of Greenwich, Solicitor attended the Board with Mr Oswald, on behalf of Messrs Starey and Oswald...' on April 12th 1852 when the matter was close to settlement.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, a legal notice concerning other clients of Bristow and Tarrant identifies the solicitors as Alfred Rhodes Bristow and William Barnes Tarrant at 2 Bond-court, Walbrook, City of London.<sup>8</sup> The partnership of Bristow and Tarrant of Walbrook and Greenwich as attorneys and solicitors was dissolved by mutual consent on March 1st 1856.<sup>9</sup>

There is no indication as to the reasons for the dissolution of the partnership. However, firstly, Alfred Bristow had started to act in local matters, having been elected to the Greenwich District Board of Works and then subsequently being elected as the Greenwich representative to the Central Board of Works.<sup>10 11</sup> Secondly, a partnership of A. and W. Bristow of Greenwich comprising Alfred Rhodes Bristow and William Bristow, a nephew of Alfred, had been established by January 1858.<sup>12</sup> This partnership acted as the solicitors for a company seeking parliamentary authority to construct the Greenwich and South Eastern Docks on the Greenwich peninsula.<sup>13</sup> Mr A.R. Bristow, Solicitor of Greenwich, himself delivered the Plan & Section and Book of Reference to the Office of the Clerk of the Peace for Kent at Maidstone at 5.30 p.m.

on 30th November 1858.<sup>14</sup> The Greenwich and South-eastern Docks Act was passed in 1859, although the docks were never built.<sup>15</sup>

Also in 1859, on April 28, Alfred Rhodes Bristow was elected to the House of Commons as the member for Kidderminster.<sup>16</sup> In a later article in the *Belfast News-Letter* their correspondent indicates that, at the 1859 election, Mr Bristow had been the agent for Mr Chambers, a candidate for Kidderminster, but when Mr Chambers withdrew from the contest he stood himself and won by 9 votes.<sup>17</sup> This gave him greater status and the Greenwich Borough Free Press recorded that William Angerstein M.P., Alderman Salomons M.P. and Alfred Rhodes Bristow M.P. would preside over a public meeting about the Royal Artillery and Marine Bands playing in Greenwich Park during the summer.<sup>18</sup> Then, in November 1859, George Black, photographer of the Strand, in a circular, invited subscriptions for an autographed 16" x 24" print portrait of Bristow costing 15 shillings. The list of current subscribers included David Salomons, M.P., Broom Hill, Tunbridge Wells; Wm B. Tarrant, 2 Bond-court, Walbrook; Coles Child, Bromley, Kent; H. E. Bristow, Langdale Place, Greenwich; E. C. Oswald, The Palace, Croydon (son and successor of John Oswald<sup>4</sup>); H. N. Pink, Croom's Hill, Greenwich.<sup>19</sup>

Bristow's career as a Liberal M.P. during the second premiership of Palmerston was quite short and relatively undistinguished. During this period questions arose about his actions as solicitor and/or executor responsible for clients' wills. In one case he was summoned to appear before the Master of the Rolls.<sup>20</sup> In another case it may be that a suit was initiated in order to obtain a legal opinion.<sup>21</sup> In the House two questions that he asked, on a fatality on the South Eastern Railway Company's North Kent Line<sup>22</sup> and on the Great Eastern<sup>23</sup> appear to have been planted. His work on the Central Board of Works was put to use in the handling of Bills dealing with amendments to the Metropolis Local Management Act. The first of these was withdrawn<sup>24</sup> but he and Mr Tite, member for Bath, were given leave to reintroduce a bill,<sup>25</sup> this had reached the stage of consideration by the House in committee, at which Mr Bristow had spoken briefly on nine occasions,<sup>26</sup> when other matters intervened.

On May 18th 1862 the partnership of Alfred Rhodes Bristow and William Bristow of Greenwich was dissolved by mutual consent<sup>27</sup> and then, on the next day, a new writ was issued for Kidderminster as Alfred Rhodes Bristow had accepted the office of Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds.<sup>28</sup> The article from the London correspondent of the *Belfast News-letter* again provides an explanation, which it gives having commented that:

'Some men are endowed with extraordinary good-fortune, and rise superior to every mundane obstacle. Of this happy number is Mr. Alfred Rhodes Bristow attorney-at-law, and lately M.P. for the select little borough of Kidderminster, in Worcestershire'; apparently Bristow had retired to provide a seat for the new Lord of the Treasury, Colonel White, and he had been rewarded with the permanent appointment of Solicitor to the Admiralty, with a salary of £2,000 per year.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his job at the Admiralty, Bristow continued occasionally acting as a private solicitor, in particular he drew up a will for George Wheelhouse, a wealthy distiller in Deptford-bridge, Kent. This was executed on August 12th 1863 and, after the death of Wheelhouse on 28th April 1864, apparently without any relatives, it was proved in London on May 20th 1864. Bristow was one of the executors and also a beneficiary.<sup>29</sup> This will resulted in various law suits in which Bristow and other executors were the defendants, sometimes with the intervention of the Attorney General.<sup>30</sup>

There are various indicators of a possible greater wealth associated with Bristow's sinecure: he is a partner of the East London Bank (1865),<sup>31</sup> and of the Central Bank of London Ltd (1873),<sup>32</sup> a shareholder of Bonelli's Electric Telegraph Company Ltd (1864),<sup>33</sup> and of the Lizard Serpentine Company Ltd (1867).<sup>34 35</sup> The addresses he gave varied. Sometimes he used his official address as Solicitor to the Admiralty<sup>32</sup> but for Bonelli's Electric Telegraph Company<sup>33</sup> he gave what is presumably a private address, The Priory, Lewisham. Bristow applied for legal approval of the winding-up of these companies: Lizard Serpentine in 1869,<sup>36</sup> Bonelli's Electric Telegraph in 1870.<sup>37</sup> The winding-up of the Lizard Serpentine Company had probably been done at the request of Coles Child of Greenwich who was a shareholder and joint liquidator of the second company. He signed the return of the Final Winding Up Meeting a few months before his death on January 16th, 1873; A.R. Bristow was seated in the second of seven mourning coaches at Coles Child's funeral.<sup>38</sup>

Alfred Rhodes Bristow himself died at the Crystal Palace Hotel at Penge on April 5th, 1875; the cause of death was: 'Natural apoplexy, attacked in the Public Street'. William Carter, Coroner for Surrey, held an inquest and provided a certificate.<sup>39</sup> The inquest convened at the Crystal Palace Hotel, Penge on April 8th, 1875 heard that Mr Alfred R. Bristow (ARB) and his wife had been staying at that hotel since 31st March. He had gone to town and returned by his usual train, when outside the High Level Station he was seen to fall suddenly backwards by his wife, niece (Miss Margaret Oswald), and an independent witness – no one was near him at

the time. The Rev. Richard Rhodes Bristow, vicar of Lewisham, gave evidence that ARB was his uncle, aged 56 and the Solicitor of the Admiralty. Mr Henry Northover Pink, surgeon, resident and in practice at Greenwich, saw ARB's body after his death and had last seen him professionally on March 28th. ARB had been suffering from an affection of the liver and indigestion, at times he had suffered from pains in the head and had been generally unwell for three months. There was no indication of a violent death and he was of the opinion that he died of apoplexy. The jury returned a verdict of "Death from natural causes".<sup>40</sup> Curiously, this report also indicates that ARB was an 'F.R.S.', this was also repeated in a note of his death published in Whitaker's Almanack for 1876. His name is not listed amongst the Fellows of the Royal Society.

Bristow died intestate and his only son, Alfred Isaac Bristow, obtained a grant of administration on April 20th 1875. On April 28th, the Revd John Holdsworth Morgan, on behalf of himself and all the other creditors of Alfred Rhodes Bristow deceased, sued Alfred Isaac Bristow.<sup>41</sup>

**John B Greig**

### **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge with gratitude the help of Paul Sowan, CNHSS librarian, and the staff of The National Archives, Greenwich Heritage, Croydon Local Studies Library and Archives Service, the Centre for Kentish Studies, Bromley Local Studies Library and Archives, and Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre.

### **References**

---

<sup>1</sup> Bound transcript of Parish Church records held by Greenwich Heritage Centre, Artillery Square, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich SE18 4DX

<sup>2</sup> Register of Marriages, 1842, Croydon Parish Church, page 189, entry 378.

<sup>3</sup> Anon., Marriages, *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 25 June 1842, Issue 4652, p.4c.

<sup>4</sup> Thornhill, L. (1987). From Palace to Washhouse – A study of the Old Palace, Croydon, from 1780 to 1887, *Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society*, **17**(9), 209-248 .

<sup>5</sup> FamilySearch, a service provided by the Church of Latter Day Saints; [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

---

<sup>6</sup> Savage, R. (1974). Croydon's Local Board of Health in the 1850s. *Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society*, **14**(13), 455-458.

<sup>7</sup> *Croydon Local Board of Health Minutes* (1852-1854), Volume 2, 12 April 1852; HEA/1/2, Local Studies Library, Croydon.

<sup>8</sup> *London Gazette*, 8 December 1848, Issue 20924, p.4489ab.

<sup>9</sup> *London Gazette*, 4 March 1856, Issue 21857, p.935b.

<sup>10</sup> Anon., Election of District Board of Works, *Daily News* (London), 3 December 1855, Issue 2977, p.2f.

<sup>11</sup> Anon., Metropolitan Board of Works, *Daily News* (London), 4 January 1856, Issue 3005, p.3d.

<sup>12</sup> *London Gazette*, 1 January 1858, Issue 22078, p.20b.

<sup>13</sup> *London Gazette*, 19 November 1858, Issue 22202, p.4923b-4924a.

<sup>14</sup> Centre for Kentish Studies, Greenwich and South Eastern Docks, Q/RUm/428a & 428b.

<sup>15</sup> Parliamentary Archives, The Greenwich and South-eastern Docks Act 1859, Local Act, 22 & 23 Victoria I, c. xx.

<sup>16</sup> HANSARD, 1803-2005, People (B);

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>

<sup>17</sup> From our own correspondent, London Correspondence, *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 May 1862, Issue 15284, p.3bc.

<sup>18</sup> Anon., Greenwich Park, *The Morning Chronicle* (London), 24 May 1859, Issue 28819, p.7f.

<sup>19</sup> Copy of George Black's circular held by Greenwich Heritage Centre, Artillery Square, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich SE18 4DX.

<sup>20</sup> *Brannan v Hughes*, C 16/101/S65, (1862). The National Archives, Richmond.

<sup>21</sup> *Hughes v Young*, C16/78/H54, (1862). The National Archives, Richmond.

<sup>22</sup> HANSARD; 1803-2005, *HC Deb 29 March 1860 vol 157 c1492*; <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

<sup>23</sup> HANSARD; 1803-2005, *HC Deb 27 June 1861 vol 163 cc1647-8*.

<sup>24</sup> HANSARD; 1803-2005, *HC Deb 16 July 1861 vol 164 cc1006-10*.

<sup>25</sup> HANSARD; 1803-2005, *HC Deb 11 February 1862 vol 165 c168*.

<sup>26</sup> HANSARD; 1803-2005, *HC Deb 30 April 1862 vol 166 cc1095-105*.

---

<sup>27</sup> *London Gazette*; 27 May 1862, Issue 22629, p.2746b.

<sup>28</sup> HANSARD; 1803-2005, *HC Deb 19 May 1862 vol 166 c1863*.

<sup>29</sup> Anon., The Bequests of a Wealthy Distiller, *The Era*, 5 June 1864, Issue 1341, page 7c.

<sup>30</sup> *Buckle v Bristow*, C 30/534 & C 16/184/B153 (1864); *Welsh v Bristow*, C 16/241/W129 (1864); *Daniels v Bristow*, C 16/335/D115 (1866); The National Archives, Richmond.

<sup>31</sup> *London Gazette*, 25 February 1865, Issue 22943, p.1176.

<sup>32</sup> *London Gazette*, 27 February 1873, Issue 23953, pp.1189-1190.

<sup>33</sup> Bonelli's Electric Telegraph Company Ltd, Summary of capital and shares, BT/31/521/2084, The National Archives, Richmond.

<sup>34</sup> Lizard Serpentine Company Ltd of 1866, List of Persons holding Shares, BT/31/1227/3176, The National Archives, Richmond.

<sup>35</sup> There were two Lizard Serpentine limited companies with founding years of 1861 and 1866. The Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society's library holds a copy of Laxton's Builder's Price Book for 1867 in which the second company advertised. Also the Society's museum holds six specimens of serpentine with labels identifying them as coming from four quarries managed by the company. The labels give a registered company address in London that was valid between April 1<sup>st</sup> 1862 and October 15<sup>th</sup> 1868.

<sup>36</sup> *London Gazette*, 18 May 1869, Issue 23498, p.2896b.

<sup>37</sup> *London Gazette*, 21 January 1870, Issue 23579, p.421a.

<sup>38</sup> Anon., The late Mr. Coles Child, *The Bromley Record*, 1 February 1873, Issue 177, pp.253-254 & 264.

<sup>39</sup> Certified Copy of an Entry of Death; GRO: Deaths Jun 1875, Bristow, Alfred Rhodes, 56, Croydon 2a 118.

<sup>40</sup> Anon., The sudden death of the Solicitor to the Admiralty, *The Norwood News and Crystal Palace Chronicle*, 10 April 1875, Vol 14, no.369, p. 5e.

<sup>41</sup> *Morgan v Bristow*, Bill of Complaint, C16/1023/M100 (1875); The National Archives, Richmond.