

Daughter of Lord Rosebery who helped Derby Gypsies

29 May 2023



Born on 18 September 1879, **Lady Sybil Myra Caroline Grant** (nee Primrose) was the daughter of **Lord Rosebery**, the Epsom resident and Liberal Prime Minister from 1894 to 1895 and Hannah de Rothschild.

Lady Sybil married a regular soldier, Sir Charles John Cecil Grant of the Grant's whisky family on 28 March 1903, at **Christ Church, Epsom Common** where the Rosebery family worshipped.

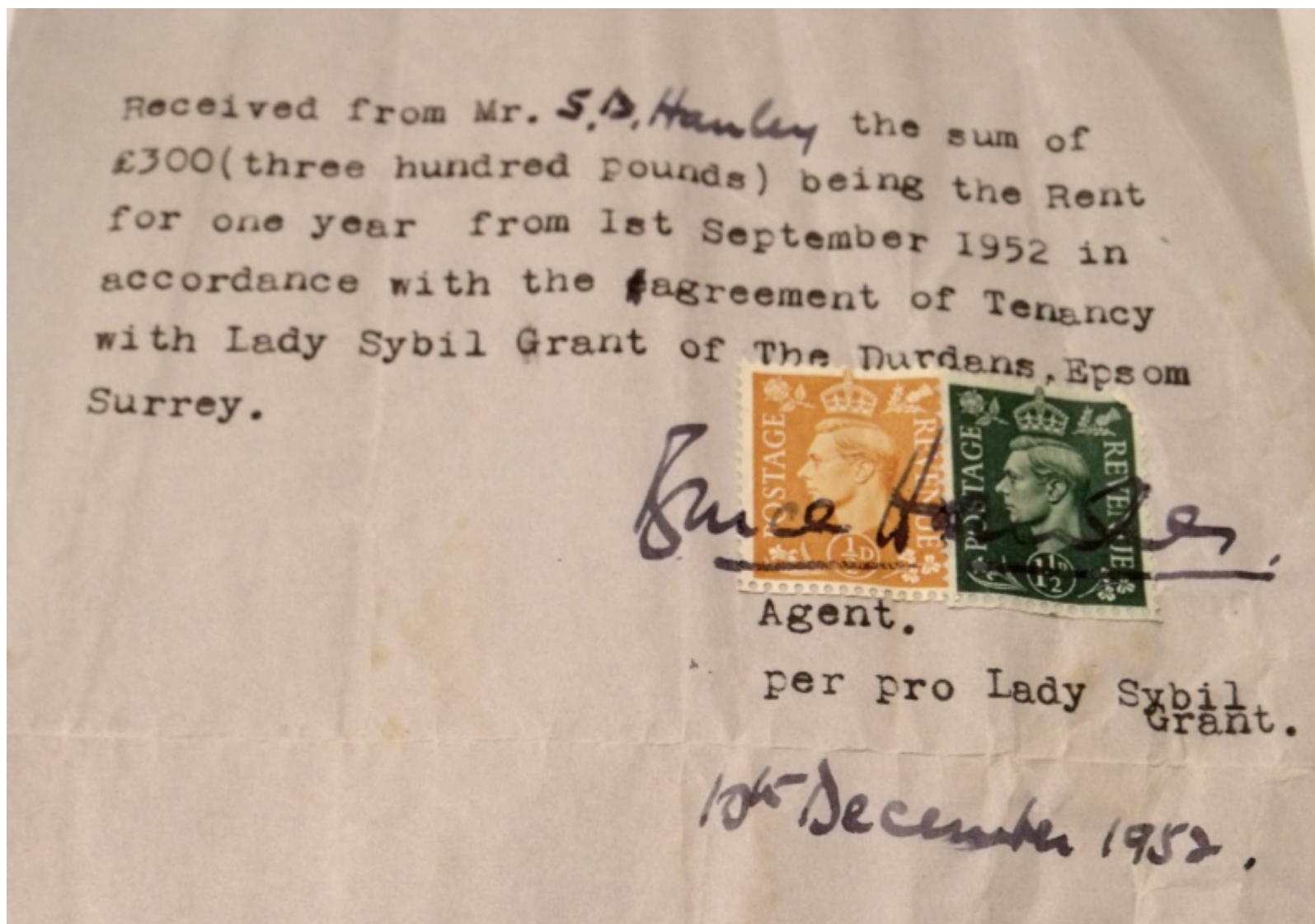
She was a successful writer, ceramic designer, artist and breeder of horses and rare dogs who inherited **The Durdans** in Chalk Lane, Epsom upon the death of her father in 1929 and made it her home.

During the First World War, she contributed to the Princess Mary's Gift Book which was a book of collected illustrated stories written by leading authors of the time such as J M Barrie, A Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling. The book was sold to help raise money for the war effort.



After WW1 Lady Grant raised money for disabled servicemen through a series of activities which included organising a fete each year at The Durdans. There her pottery (and that crafted by disabled soldiers) was sold for the disabled soldiers' benefit.

The banding wheel used to decorate ceramics shown in the photo dates to circa 1950 and came from Jo's Household Clearances in Ewell with a receipt signed on behalf of Lady Sybil Grant for land rented out to an Epsom racehorse trainer.



Lady Sybil Grant was a passionate campaigner and sought to champion the underdog. In 1937, a new set of by-laws were (presumably) promulgated by the newly chartered Epsom Council. (The Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators was created in 1984.) The regulations prohibited gypsy caravans from being sited on Epsom Downs. Lady Grant then provided gypsies with a field on her own land where they were legally permitted to stay for Derby week.

In June 1938 the Epsom gypsies decorated Lady Grant's grandstand box with 700 artificial flowers to show their gratitude, an act that highlighted the close bond of friendship that had developed between the parties. Sybil in later life spent much of her time in a caravan as she grew increasingly eccentric prior to her death on 25 February 1955.

My research suggests that the banding wheel once belonged to the multi-talented Lady Sybil Grant who spent a full and active life devoted to helping others less fortunate than herself.

After her death, among other things, a collection of maps of Epsom were lodged with the National Library of Scotland; no doubt on account of the family's various ties of an hereditary, electoral and property nature to Scotland

Perhaps Lady Sybil Grant deserves greater recognition than she currently receives.

Royal Patronage of Epsom College to continue?

29 May 2023



Epsom College has been honoured to receive unbroken royal patronage from a reigning monarch since 1855 when Queen Victoria became the College's first Patron and upon its opening by HRH Prince Albert.

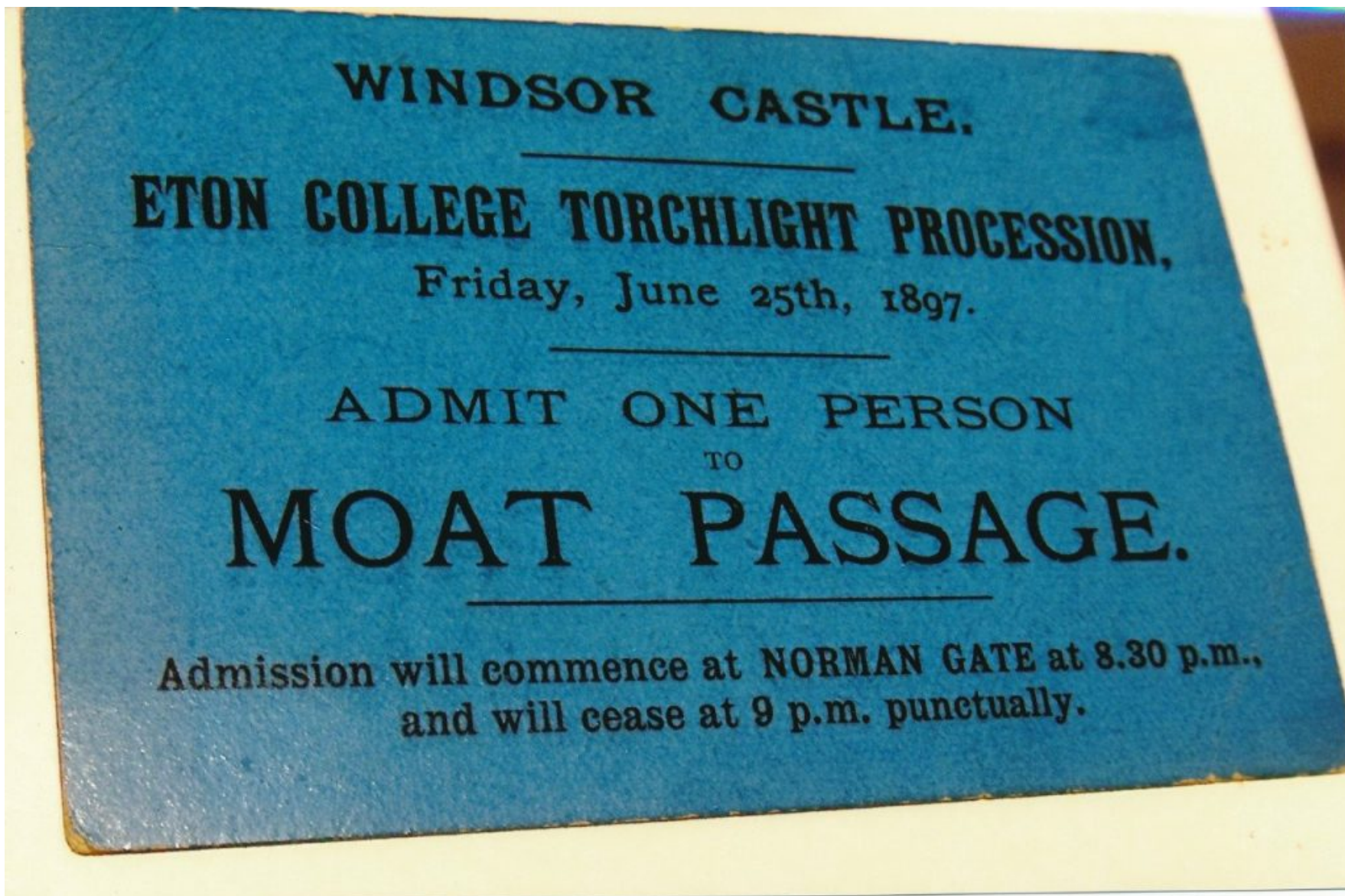
Whilst the College's royal patronage is unbroken, with the recent passing of Queen Elizabeth II and after Saturday's Coronation it is hoped King Charles III will become Patron of Epsom College sometime in the future.

Queen Victoria never actually visited Epsom College. However, she did attend the Epsom Derby in 1840, having first attended it with her mother, as a twelve year old child in 1831.

Queen Victoria watched "Little Wonder", a 50-1 outsider win the 1840 Epsom Derby and Her Majesty went on to present the jockey, the youngest and smallest in the race, with a gold whip for his victory.

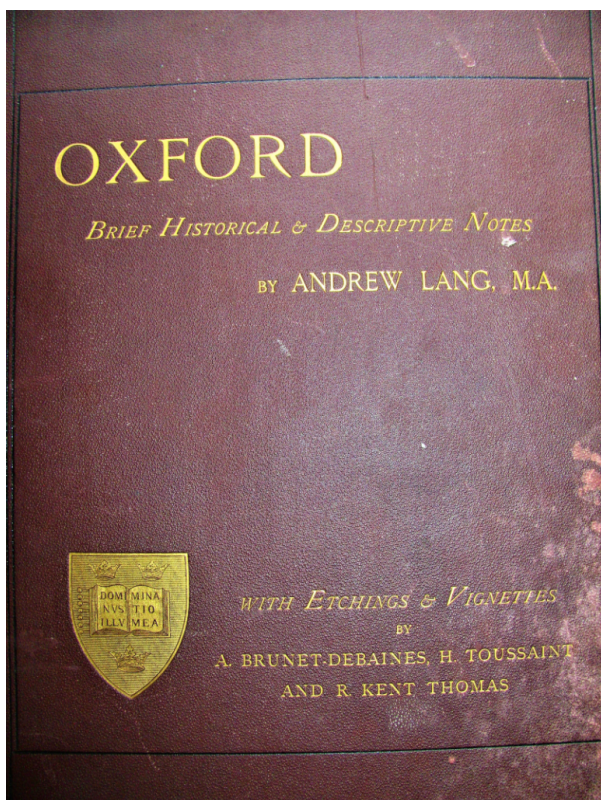
Queen Victoria had been expected to return to Epsom to attend further Derbys, but sadly after 1840 she never visited Epsom again. Perhaps because of the difficulties she had experienced getting to the race track due to crowds blocking her route. This led to the construction of Tattenham Corner Train Station, that was completed after her death in 1901 and was

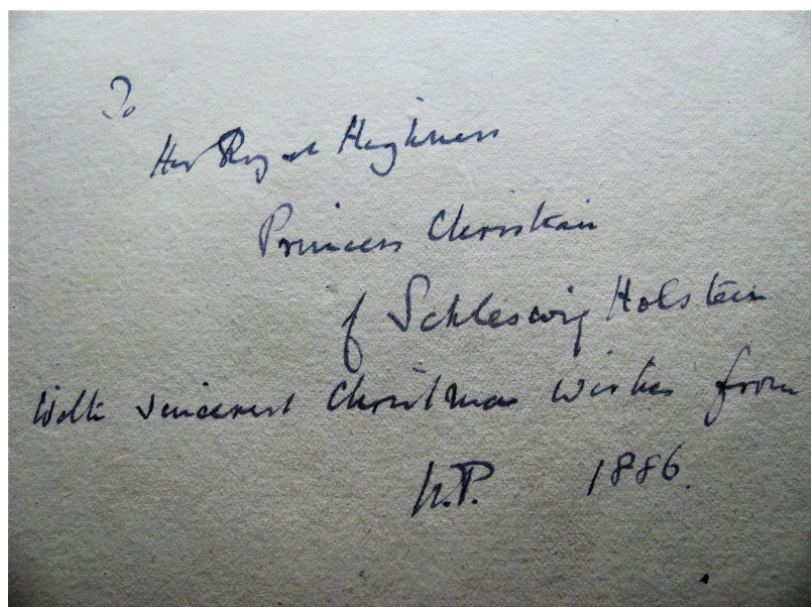
used by succeeding British monarchs.



The entrance ticket to The Eton College Torchlight Procession at Windsor Castle, which took place in Queen Victoria's presence during her Diamond Jubilee, was found inside a book purchased from Jo's Household Clearances in Ewell.

An interesting book about Oxford that was given to Queen Victoria's third daughter Helena, after she became Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, came from the same establishment a few years ago.



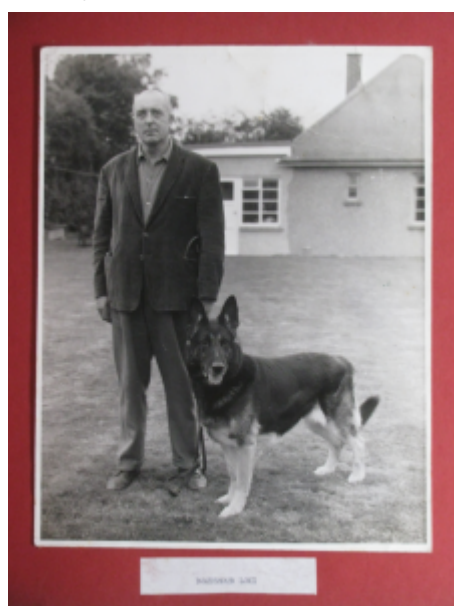


The book about Oxford, which bears the inscription date of 1886, was given to the Princess as a Christmas present. The timing of the gift would have coincided with her eldest son, Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein, commencing his Oxford University education at Magdalen College.

If anyone knows whose initials are at the bottom of the inscription, or whether Queen Victoria's third daughter Helena had any links with Epsom that caused her book to be discovered in Ewell, please let me know by contacting The Epsom and Ewell Times.

Surrey Police's nose for dog training

29 May 2023



Surrey Police led the way in Police Dog development by offering a Metropolitan Police Officer, DC **Harry Darbyshire**, a transfer to the Surrey Constabulary in October 1947, where he was made a Sergeant and put in charge of the Force's new Police Dog Section.

Top image is Sgt Darbyshire with Anna of Avondale's son Loki

Whilst dogs had been used by British Police Forces in various limited capacities prior to the Second World War, it was not until after the war that Britain's Police Forces began to consider the possibility of using working dogs to undertake major Police work on a daily basis.

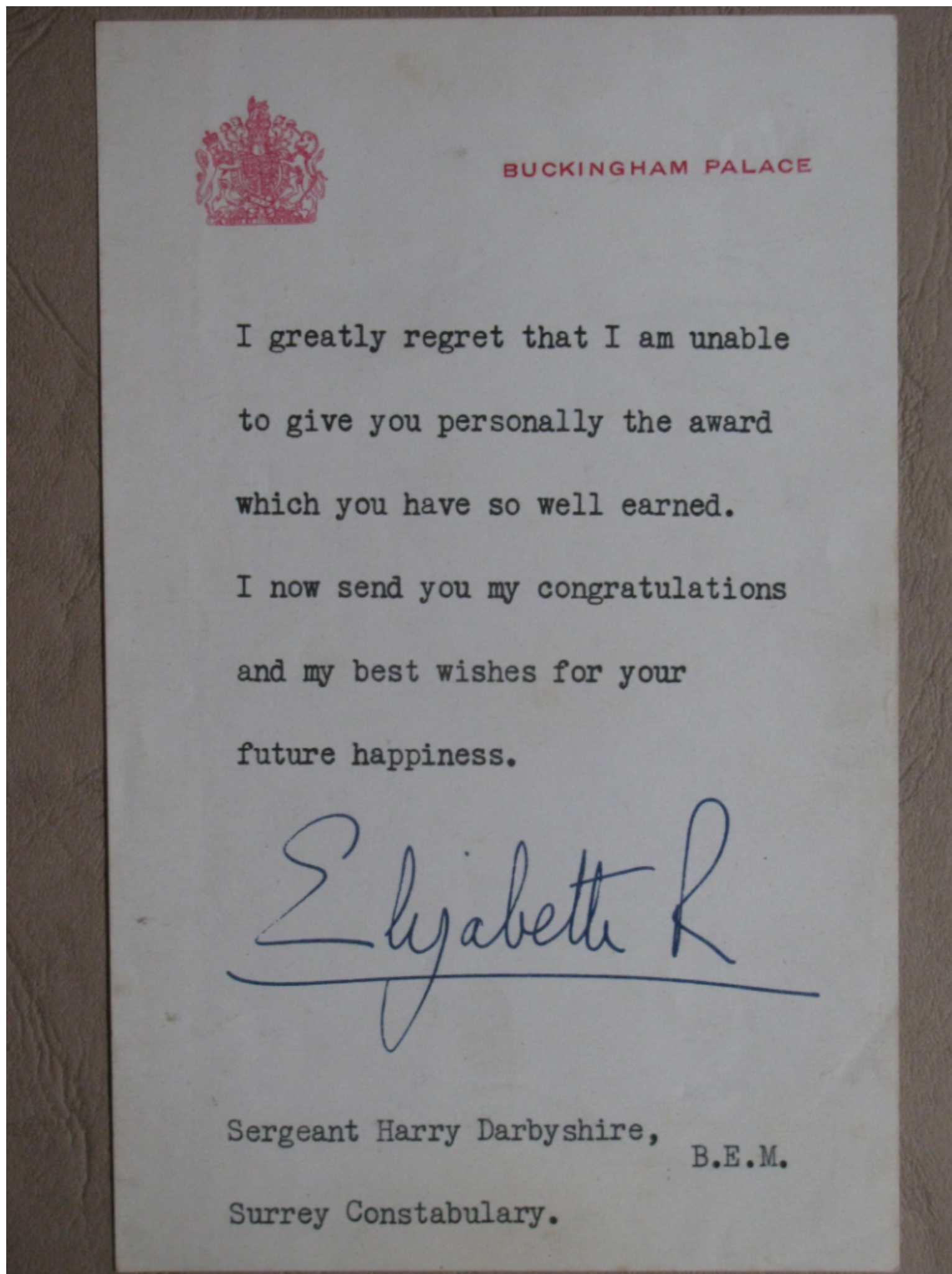
Sergeant Darbyshire was experienced in breeding dogs and training them according to the German method. This was the method Surrey Police had researched and decided to proceed with.

Sergeant Darbyshire owned a German Shepherd dog called "**Anna of Avondale**" that had previously belonged to a German soldier, who had served during the war. Anna of Avondale was Surrey Police's first operational dog and together with her son, **Loki**, formed the Surrey Police Dog Section that would go on to lead the way in Police dog development in Britain and abroad.

Surrey Police dogs that performed well would be included in the breeding programme, with under achieving dogs being removed from the Police Dog Section altogether.

Sir **Joseph Simpson**, the Chief Constable, who had recruited Sergeant Darbyshire was a member of the Kennel Club and his interest in working dogs led to him sanctioning the expansion of the Police Dog Section and encouraging Surrey Police's dog handlers to enter civilian Working Trials. This led to the Surrey Police's Dog Section obtaining even greater recognition due to the high number of awards it won.

The Secretary of the Associated Sheep, Police and Army Dog Society (**ASPADS**) (also known as the Working Trials Society) has stated that, "Harry Darbyshire did more than any other person to put ASPADS, Working Trials and the Nation's Police Dog Sections on the map". Darbyshire was credited with training over 200 dogs in his 29 years police service. He was consulted from around the world, including Kenya and New Zealand.



I was delighted to discover that the photo album containing images of German Shepherd dogs that I had won on an online auction site, once belonged to Sgt. Darbyshire.

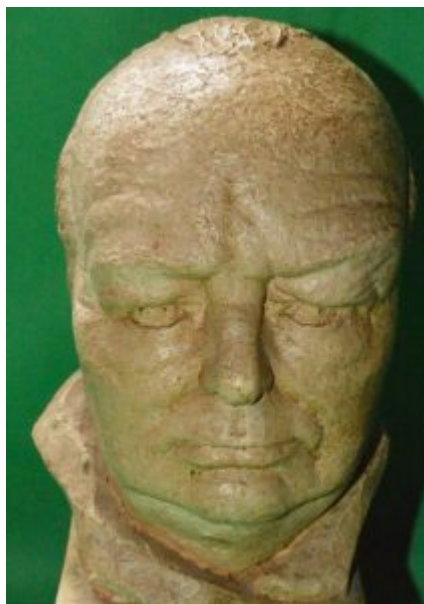
Surrey Police's first Police Dog, Anna of Avondale died in August 1950, but her name lives on in The Anna of Avondale Trophy, which serving Police Dogs and their handlers compete for every year in her memory.

The images accompanying this article were taken from the photo album and show Sergeant Darbyshire, who was awarded the BEM (British Empire Medal), with some of his working dogs.

Sgt Darbyshire's award of the BEM signed by the Monarch of the day.

Churchill's visits to Epsom

29 May 2023



In 1903 Winston Churchill, then the MP for Oldham, visited Epsom College and unveiled a memorial stained glass window in memory of the Old Epsomians who had died in the Boer War. The memorial stained glass window was commissioned and paid for by Old Epsomians and designed by Francis Oldaker. Oldaker was an Old Epsomian and stained glass artist, he lived locally and is buried in Epsom's Ashley Road cemetery.



Unveiled by Winston Churchill. Image courtesy Epsom College

Winston Churchill was a fan of horse raising and attended the Epsom Derby on 4 June 1949 with his wife Clementine. He became Sir Winston in 1953.

I'm hoping that readers will be able throw light on a plaster bust of Churchill created by Churchill's only female cousin, Clare Sheridan in 1943.

Clare Sheridan was a "colourful" character who established herself as a successful sculptor of portrait busts; her sitters included her then lover, the actor Charlie Chaplin together with H G Wells, Lord Asquith, Trotsky and Lenin. Her involvement with prominent Russians led to her being placed under surveillance by British intelligence much to the embarrassment of Churchill and his political colleagues who urged him to stay away from her.

Sheridan's bronze busts of her first cousin Churchill were created during World War 2, but only after Sheridan threatened to commit suicide outside 10 Downing Street if Churchill failed to allow her to sculpt him. Examples of her bronze busts of Sir Winston Churchill can be found at Churchill's former home, Chartwell as well as at Blenheim Palace, Harrow School

and Hastings Town Hall, but the whereabouts of a smaller bust created by Clare Sheridan especially for Churchill's wife, Clementine is not known.

References to Clare Sheridan's bronze busts of Sir Winston Churchill can be found in quite a few of Churchill's WW2 letters, but having studied all the relevant letters in great detail, I have not been able to find out anything about the smaller plaster bust which I purchased at a London estate sale.

Could it be that the 9-inch-high plaster bust of Sir Winston Churchill that I acquired at an estate sale is the small bust of Sir Winston Churchill that wartime letters confirm was given to Churchill's wife, Clementine by Clare Sheridan?

Please contact The Epsom and Ewell Times if you have any information about Clare Sheridan's small plaster bust of Sir Winston Churchill.

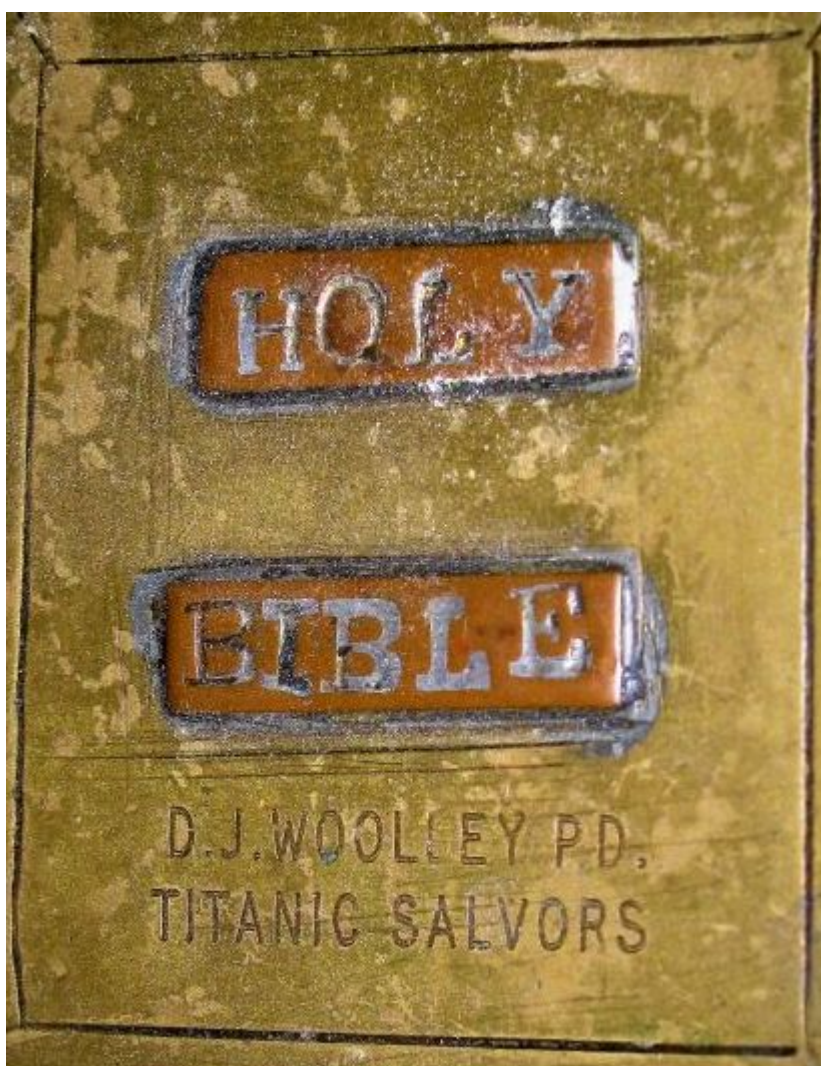
Epsom's Titanic Ties

29 May 2023



Epsom and Ewell Times' **History Detectorist** purchased this miniature brass bible box from The Princess Alice charity shop in Epsom 2 years ago in the belief it was a piece of World War 1 trench art, but after some light cleaning he was astonished to discover the word "**Titanic**" engraved on it.

Reference is also made to **Douglas Woolley**, who claims to own the salvage rights to the Titanic and who in the 1960s made plans to locate and raise the Titanic, a plan that involved inflating nylon balloons and attaching them to the Titanic's hull.



Although Douglas Woolley's dream of raising the wreck of the RMS Titanic and creating a floating museum in Liverpool was never realised, he wrote a book on the subject and continues to maintain that he owns the salvage rights to the "unsinkable" ship that sank off the coast of Newfoundland in the North Atlantic in the early hours of 15 April 1912 after colliding with an an iceberg.

The disaster resulted in the loss of an estimated 1,500 lives, partly due to a lack of lifeboats and 2 of Douglas Woolley's great aunts may also have drowned had it not been for a premonition which caused them to cancel their trip on board the Titanic at the last minute and not travel with their luggage which went down with the ship.

Could it be that the miniature brass bible box had once belonged to one of Douglas Woolley's great aunts, or perhaps one of the survivors of the Titanic?

Having wanted to raise the RMS Titanic, is it possible that Douglas Woolley was gifted the miniature brass bible box after it was salvaged from the wreck?

If the engraving on the miniature bible box was intended to deceive for the purposes of financial gain, then why was the box donated to a charity shop and why is the name "Douglas Woolley" engraved on it when the name of a member of the Titanic's crew would have caused the box to fetch more money at auction?



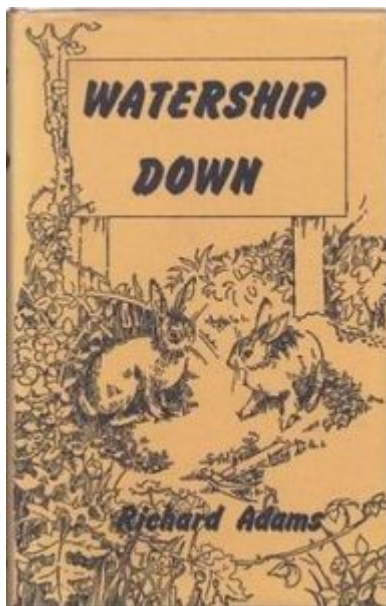
Unfortunately, Douglas Woolley is now an elderly gentleman and I have not been able to make contact with him, but if any readers can tell me anything about this interesting brass object and how it came to be purchased by myself in an Epsom charity shop, The Epsom and Ewell Times and myself would be delighted to hear from you.

George Pelham served on the Titanic as a Trimmer and survived the sinking. It is thought he survived another sinking of a ship during the First World War and these circumstances eventually led to his nervous breakdown and admission to **Horton asylum in Epsom** in 1935. 42 days after he was transferred to the neighbouring **Longrove Hospital** he died and was buried in the **Horton Cemetery** in Epsom on 14th October 1939.

You can read the full story on www.hortoncemetery.org and also read about the campaign to restore the Cemetery where 9000 patients of Epsom's cluster of psychiatric hospitals were buried between 1899 and 1955 and now lay abandoned.

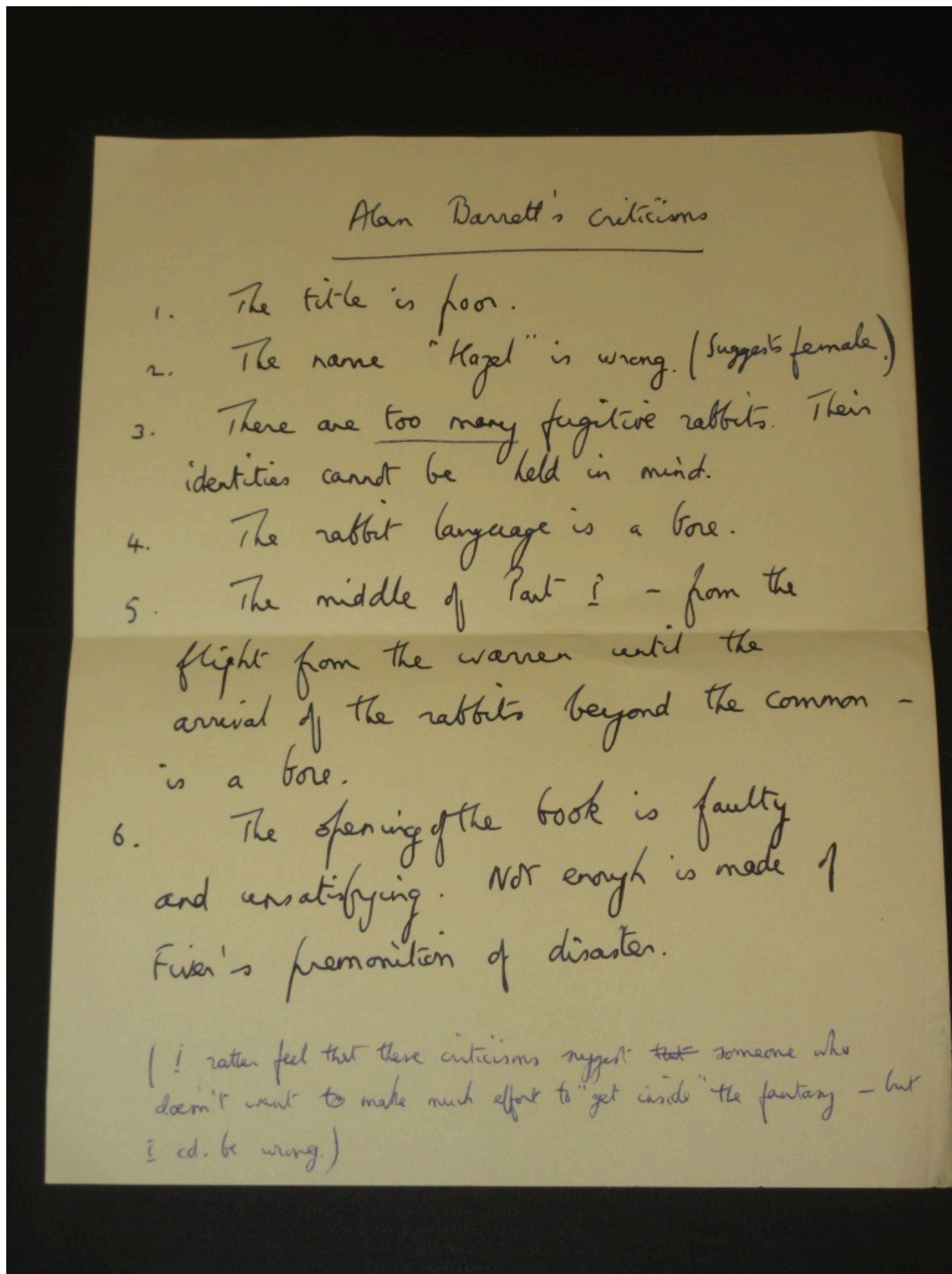
How "Watership Down" might have been....

29 May 2023



Exclusive to Epsom and Ewell Times a local resident known as "**The History Detectorist**" will disclose on these pages intriguing discoveries. Today's discovery relates to "**Watership Down**". In the coming months other intriguing discoveries will be revealed.....

The History Detectorist could not believe his luck when he discovered pre-publication notes relating to the international best-selling novel, "Watership Down" that had remained hidden inside a book that had once belonged to the book's author, Richard Adams.



Alan Barrett's criticisms

1. The title is poor.
2. The name "Hazel" is wrong. (Suggests female.)
3. There are too many fugitive rabbits. Their identities cannot be held in mind.
4. The rabbit language is a bore.
5. The middle of Part 1 - from the flight from the warren until the arrival of the rabbits beyond the common - is a bore.
6. The opening of the book is faulty and unsatisfying. Not enough is made of Fiver's premonition of disaster.

(I rather feel that these criticisms suggest ~~that~~ someone who doesn't want to make much effort to "get inside" the fantasy - but I cd. be wrong.)

A lifelong fan of Watership Down, he purchased a box of books from a book dealer who had won them at auction prior to the much publicized sale of Richard Adams's more valuable books which he had collected prior to his passing in December 2016 aged 96.

Among the books purchased from the dealer were papers and photographs that had been found inside the books won at auction which are now known to have belonged to Richard Adams also.

"The significance of Richard Adams's notes were not fully understood until I approached Oxford University and corresponded with Richard Adams's daughters", said the History Detectorist, who went on to discover that Alan Barrett, whose name is mentioned at the top of the notes, was an Oxford University friend of Richard Adams. Barrett would give his opinion on the likely success of many of Adams' books and suggest changes etc. "It would appear that the notes were hidden away for more than 50 years so I was delighted to be able to send copies of them to Richard Adams's family".

Fortunately, in this instance Alan Barrett's criticisms did not deter Richard Adams from publishing his first novel, Watership Down, although at the time the notes were drafted the popular story of rabbits fleeing their home and being forced to find a new one was due to be called "Hazel and Fiver", a title that Alan Barrett clearly objected to and possibly helped to change prior to the first publication of Watership Down in 1972.