



THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN & BATTLE

Andy Saunders

10 September 2010

Andy Saunders spoke to the Society on the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain; his talk also coincided with the 60th birthday of the Historical Society. The Battle of Britain is dated unofficially as from 10th July to 31st October 1940, although by October the emphasis had shifted from the strafing of airfields to the bombing of civilians. Late in the war, a German General, imprisoned by the Russians, had given his opinion that the Battle of Britain was the most important campaign of the war. Had England been defeated at this time, the consequences would have been dramatic, denying the remaining allies (and subsequently the United States) an invaluable anchorage in Europe. The Germans, however, seem to have considered the Battle as nothing more than a continuation of the air battle that had started at Dunkirk, although they recognised that any occupation of England would be impossible without control of the air.

As intimated in the title of his talk, Mr. Saunders concentrated on the Battle Rural District area, one of considerable size over which much of the air conflict was fought.

He gave some statistics for the whole war:

- 87 crashed aircraft
- 2,472 alerts
- 989 incidents
- 30 civilian fatalities
- 75 seriously injured
- 249 slightly injured
- 166 habitations destroyed
- 8,282 properties damaged

This last is a startling figure, but it has to be remembered that during the VI campaign of 1944, it was Government policy to shoot down as many rockets as possible immediately on crossing the coast.

The first crashed plane of 1940 fell at School Farm, Hooe, on the 15th August. The pilot of the German Messerschmitt 110 was captured and taken to Battle Abbey. Later crashed pilots had differing experiences, some amusing, but many of course fatal. In the Hooe case the pilot lived on until recent years.

On the 29th August, another German plane was shot down by Flight Lieutenant Peter Townsend at New Lodge Farm, Hooe – the pilot was killed and buried in Turkey Road cemetery with full military honours. Later the body was exhumed and buried in a military cemetery but, for many years, local people tended the grave and placed flowers upon it.



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In contrast to this act of humanity, a young girl who gave first aid to a seriously wounded German pilot in Brede was severely criticised by the locals who suggested she should “let him die”. Interestingly, the pilot survived and from prison wrote to the German High Command suggesting that his young saviour should be given a medal for “Humanity” after the War. For obvious reasons, none was awarded.

In another incident, near Udimore, a plane crashed into a cottage garden, coming to rest within feet of an occupied outdoor toilet. This aircraft (a Spitfire) was later repaired and subsequently put on display in South Africa.

Particularly amusing (and so redolent of “Dads Army”) was the farmer who rescued a German pilot and discovered he was a fellow dairyman. He got him to help with the morning’s milking before being arrested! On another occasion, a crashed German pilot was first treated by a local doctor for tonsillitis before being taken into custody.



Peter Townsend (*third from the left*) leading Hurricanes of 85 Squadron. Photograph from Peter Townsend’s book, *Duel of Eagles*, 1970.



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

One significant incident involved a raid on Kenley aerodrome when the pilots missed the target and dropped bombs on Croydon, causing serious damage and loss of civilian life. This was in late August and pre-dated the first bombing raids on London. It is possible that this was the raid that triggered a retaliatory British attack on German civilians, and precipitated the subsequent tit-for-tat bombing of London in September.

German pilots were instructed to set fire to the remains of their planes at the crash site, but both British and German planes were at the mercy of young souvenir hunters who always seemed to reach the crash sites before the Home Guard or the police. The courage of the pilots on both sides was remarkable and generally chivalrous. Rescued German pilots usually offered no resistance and were fed and well-treated.

British pilots, back from a sortie, commonly first made for the mess or the local pub, even if injured. Peter Townsend reputedly was so drunk after one venture that he was able to have a fractured toe removed without anaesthetic. Some tales may be apocryphal, but it is apparent that the mood of the nation was electric: apprehension and fear mixing equally with excitement and pride. Everyone understood the implications of defeat. By the end of October, the onslaught on the airfields and radar sites had effectively ceased and the achievement of all allied pilots was recognised by Churchill in the famous words “Never was so much owed by so many to so few” – and so the legend was born.

David Sawyer

THE DREGS OF THE PEOPLE REMAIN

Imogen Corrigan

8 October 2010

The title of the lecture, said Imogen Corrigan, is taken from a contemporary account of the deadly pandemic that struck Europe in the mid-fourteenth century: the Black Death. The exact cause of the pandemic is still a matter of medical debate. The prevalent theory is that it was bubonic plague that was transmitted to humans by fleas carried by rats. The outbreak spread via land and sea trade routes from Central Asia across the Middle East to Europe in the west and China in the east.

During 1315–21, climate changes led to floods, harsh winters and successive harvest failures followed by the Great Famine. This in turn led to the breakdown of society on the continent and a malnourished population that was susceptible to the Plague. The Black Death is estimated to have killed 30–60% of Europe's population, although some areas, such as Poland, seem to have inexplicably escaped the outbreak. It reached England via Weymouth and spread across the country causing the death of a third of the population. Modern discoveries and research indicate that the mortality rate may have been as high as 60% of the population dying in an eighteen-month period. Outbreaks of the plague continued to re-occur in Europe, although usually in a less severe form, up to the end of the eighteenth century. In England, the Great Plague of London raged through the capital in 1665–6 just preceding the Great Fire.

Mediaeval people saw the disease as God's punishment, a scourge and retribution and called it the Great Pestilence, Great Plague or Great Mortality. The name, Black Death, which describes the later stages of the disease was coined by Justus Hecker, a nineteenth-century German physician. Symptoms of the plague were the appearance of buboes in the groin, neck, and armpits, dark spots on the skin with secretions of pus, fever, vomiting and painful joints. Once infected, most victims died within a week. All classes of society were stricken from the peasant to the ruling aristocracy. The clergy were severely affected, leading to emergency ordinations, lowering of standards and, hence, less respect for the church. People wanted to know what were the causes and how to contain the spread. Those that could, fled infected towns and villages, unwittingly

helping to spread the outbreak. Suggestions included shunning victims, killing dogs, fasting on Fridays, religious processions, even flagellation (worth a try but denounced by the Pope). Jews and lepers were persecuted and work on buildings virtually ceased (at Winchester Cathedral, five master- masons died).

The medieval world became obsessed with luck and death and Purgatory. Pilgrimages were made to ensure personal purity. The art commissioned reflected this: the seven vices and seven virtues around the entrance to Paradise appeared painted or carved around the entrance porches or the chancel arches of churches, e.g. the Dance Macabre at Kermaria, Brittany, and the Dance of Death at Boxgrove Abbey. More skulls appear in painting and carvings, replacing the Foliate Man. There was also a growth in the cult of Mary, but there some signs of optimism: carved angels appear overhead on the nave roof or on walls, offering protection to the congregation, as at Chester Cathedral.

By the time the Black Death had run its course, the population had been dramatically reduced. One of the outcomes was the immediate cessation of the war with France; the so-called Hundred Years War was later resumed by France to their advantage. New colleges were founded as acts of piety and to replace the loss of academics. Peasant revolts, labour shortages allowed peasants to get higher wages for their work and even to buy land and and get better prices for their produce, leading to higher prices for basic foods. These changes led to the breakdown of the Feudal system with lasting effects on the structure of society.

Imogen Corrigan had given us a gruesome yet gripping insight into these catastrophic times.

Malcolm Stocker





THE INDUSTRIAL HISTORY OF SUSSEX

Geoff Mead

14th January 2011

Geoff described himself as “an historical geographer” and went on to explain that this involves the study of the changing landscape over time. His theme in this presentation was the changing scene of industry in Sussex, a topic which spanned some 3000 years, and covered a wide variety of industrial activities across the county. At first sight it may seem surprising to refer to “Sussex Industry” for, by comparison with the Midlands and the North, Sussex seems far from industrial; but it was pointed out that these northern industrial regions are relative latecomers, primarily as a result of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries.

It was suggested that industrial activity can be characterised by three phases: the primary phase is the extraction of raw materials – quarrying, mining, woodcutting, etc.: these are relatively low value activities, whereas the secondary phase, the processing of raw materials into products, are added value activities which often require a higher level of social organisation and structure; and finally there is the infrastructure and service phase, which facilitates trade, social and leisure activities and employs a larger number of people. Geoff selected examples of industrial activities over time in Sussex to illustrate these phases at work in the county.

Sussex geology has provided a rich variety of mineral assets that have been extracted and exploited for over 3000 years, starting with flint, used for arrowheads and early tools; shallow pits in chalky ground can be indicators of flint collecting pits. Even this activity would spawn ancillary industry e.g., rope making and basket making to haul up and carry the mined flints. Iron ore features in Sussex from the Iron Age through to the early nineteenth century (Ashburnham 1820); local landmarks include “bell pits” and slag materials from the iron smelting bloomeries. The small nodules of iron ore were hosted by the Wadhurst clay found throughout the Sussex Weald and extensive forests provided the wood that was converted to charcoal for fueling the furnaces. The clay itself was used widely for brickmaking. Greensands running around the county were the source of fine sands for a Sussex glass making industry from the twelfth to seventeenth centuries and the substantial chalk deposits provided limestone for conversion to lime for use in cement manufacture. Finally, the Purbeck Beds contain the useful plaster mineral gypsum, which has been mined in the Battle district for some 140 years.

A couple of little known and rather unusual activities in Sussex also exploited the local geology: the collection of copperas and blue boulders. Until quite recently, Portslade was known as Copperas Gap, by virtue of the amount of the mineral copperas (ferrous sulphate) extracted from the London Clay that underlay the creek. This mineral was used for a number of industrial processes including ink manufacture and in wool dyeing as a mordant. Along the coast to Rye and Winchelsea the pebble beach there included blue



stones (really flints) that were collected by “Blue Boulder Men” using two Sussex trugs suspended from a shoulder harness. These stones were transported by sea and road to Staffordshire to be ground up and applied as a fine glaze to pottery.

Another landscape feature that survives in some Sussex villages today is the hammer pond – originally a damned water course for channelling water through a wheel to operate the giant bellows for the furnaces. In some cases these ponds were later used in the nineteenth century for early fish farms! Windmills were another feature of the Sussex downland scenery, using the lay of the land to pick up the ready southwest winds, whereas the coastal plains were extensively used to grow corn for which Sussex became known as the breadbasket of England.



Plumpton Cox's Brickyard

A significant factor cited in the growth of the towns in Sussex was the development of transport, from horse-drawn buses, diesel coaches, trolley buses to railway trains. All contributed to the mobility of the population and so the catchment area for working people extended to beyond walking distance, leading eventually to urban sprawl. As the production of iron and steel moved to the coal-rich areas of the Midlands and North, and the gunpowder industry went into decline in the eighteenth century, Sussex turned to post-industrial pursuits, especially the development of a leisure industry.

Relatively easy access from London and the Home Counties to coastal towns of the South coast created the “seaside” experience. Brighton, Bognor, Eastbourne and Hastings for example all developed a tourist industry, from hotels, entertainment halls (including piers), beach facilities and swimming pools to exotic features – such as Volk's Electric Railway built



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



along the sea-front at Brighton in 1883. During the 19th century the railway network in the South developed to accommodate and extend the tourist trade. In Brighton the first major locomotive works in Britain built over 1200 locomotives between 1852 and 1957. Another “first” (in the world) was the introduction in 1934 of the all-electric luxury Pullman car service from London to Brighton known as The Brighton Belle. Coming right up to date, Geoff pointed out that servicing the business and leisure “industries” Gatwick airport is now the largest single employer in Sussex.

This was a very well presented excursion through time and across the County and Geoff probably surprised many of us just how industrial Sussex has been over 3000 years!

Trevor Devon



AUNT BARBARA AND HER FIREPLACE

Charlotte Moore

11th February 2011

Charlotte Moore, a local author, introduced the audience to her great, great, great-aunt Barbara with a picture of her aunt that had always hung in her family home. Aunt Barbara was one of those Victorian women who truly deserved the epithet “larger than life”. Her full name was Barbara Leigh Smith and after she married, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon.

Aunt Barbara had many diverse interests and enthusiasms and was very influential in raising the status of women. A radical Victorian feminist, she was instrumental in campaigning for women’s rights to go to university, to vote, and to own their own money and property. She was a prime mover in all these campaigns and in many others, and was a co-founder of Girton College Cambridge, the first university to admit women. Aunt Barbara was a vibrant and interesting character with a wide circle of friends. She was also an artist and had many friends who were artists and writers. When visitors came to stay at Scalands Gate, her home near Robertsbridge that she designed and had built herself, they were asked to paint their names around the brick fireplace in the house. These inscriptions still survive to-day and reflect the huge range of her interests, providing a fascinating picture of Barbara and her social circle.

Barbara’s background was very mixed. Her father Benjamin Smith, a powerful character, came from a large extended family of radical Unitarians amongst whom was Florence Nightingale (Barbara’s first cousin). On a visit to Derbyshire where the Nightingales lived, Benjamin fell in love with a local milliner, Anne Longden, and Barbara was born soon after, followed by two more sisters and two brothers. Although she was illegitimate, Barbara was not ashamed of the fact, and always sided with the underdog and those less fortunate. She described herself as “one of the cracked people of the world who liked to herd with the cracked”. All her life she sympathised with outcasts and people who did not follow the normal trajectory.

There were several reasons why her father did not marry her mother, but he always looked after her and took a great interest in his five children. He passionately believed in the highest education of women and insisted that his daughters should be as well educated as his sons. When his daughters came of age, he gave them each a considerable sum of money to enable them to keep their independence. With her money Barbara started a radical infants’ school in London and later on gave a large sum towards the founding of Girton College.

Barbara’s best friend was Bessie Rayner Parkes, who later married Hilaire Belloc’s father. Bessie described Barbara “as the most powerful woman I have ever known”. Unchaperoned, they travelled together on the Continent and even shortened their skirts, prompting Barbara to write a ditty:



Oh! Isn't it jolly
To cast away folly
And cut all one's clothes a peg shorter
(A good many pegs)
And rejoice in one's legs
Like a free-minded Albion's daughter

Barbara eventually married a French physician, Dr. Eugene Bodichon, who was a rather peculiar character, and together they led a rather unconventional and challenging life. Barbara built Scalands to remind him of his childhood Breton home, designing it in a plain and simple style. Another of her friends, Gertrude Jekyll helped her to plan the gardens. Barbara continued to entertain her wide social circle at Scalands and among the inscriptions around the fireplace were those of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George Eliot. Barbara had arranged convalescent accommodation for Lizzie Siddal, who lived with Rossetti, in Hastings when she was dying of tuberculosis. Barbara and Bessie were the only two of George Eliot's women friends who continued to see and support her when she started to live with George Henry Lewes: a relationship that scandalised society at the time. Barbara was one of the first to guess that her friend Mary Ann Evans was the writer behind the pseudonym "George Eliot".

Other not so famous names whom Barbara supported were Alfred Clements and Alice Breech. Alfred was the illegitimate son of Barbara's maid and Mrs Breech was employed to look after him. Barbara became his guardian and left him a legacy. Another protégée, Sarah Phoebe Marks, became a very important person in Barbara's life. Sarah was the daughter of a Jewish refugee that Barbara and her friends funded; always called Hertha, she was sent to Girton. Hertha was left an annuity by Barbara and became an eminent physicist and the first woman member of the Institute of Electrical Engineers. Hertha published a book on physics that she dedicated to Barbara, and more personally, named her daughter after her benefactor. Barbara Bodichon Ayrton subsequently became a Labour MP for Hendon North in 1945, which would have pleased Barbara enormously.

Barbara suffered a severe stroke at the age of 50, followed by a further one from which she died in 1891. Scalands still exists and the fireplace is still there with its inscriptions. The house is now occupied by two doctors, one of whom is a woman, which is perhaps a fitting tribute to Barbara.

Sue Moore



Barbara Bodichon of Scalands Gate
born Leigh Smith

Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon at Scalands Gate



THE BATTLE FOR MOSCOW 1941-42: HITLER'S FIRST DEFEAT

Dr Michael K. Jones

11th March 2011

It was with eager anticipation that the audience awaited Dr Jones's lecture on the basis of his earlier talks (Bosworth Feb 2006 & Leningrad Feb 2008) We were not to be disappointed.

The Campaign and Battles to capture Moscow were, Dr Jones considered, a turning point in WWII. By the summer/autumn 1941 the German army had achieved astonishing results in advancing 600 miles towards Moscow. Napoleon in 1812 had captured Moscow but had to retreat due to lack of supplies and, with the onset of winter, it is estimated that some 35,000 soldiers froze to death as they were not equipped for the extreme conditions. The lesson from history had not been learned by Hitler and the German Army was not prepared for fighting in a Russian winter. But the army did not fall apart, cohesion and discipline were maintained and the front held, unlike 1812.

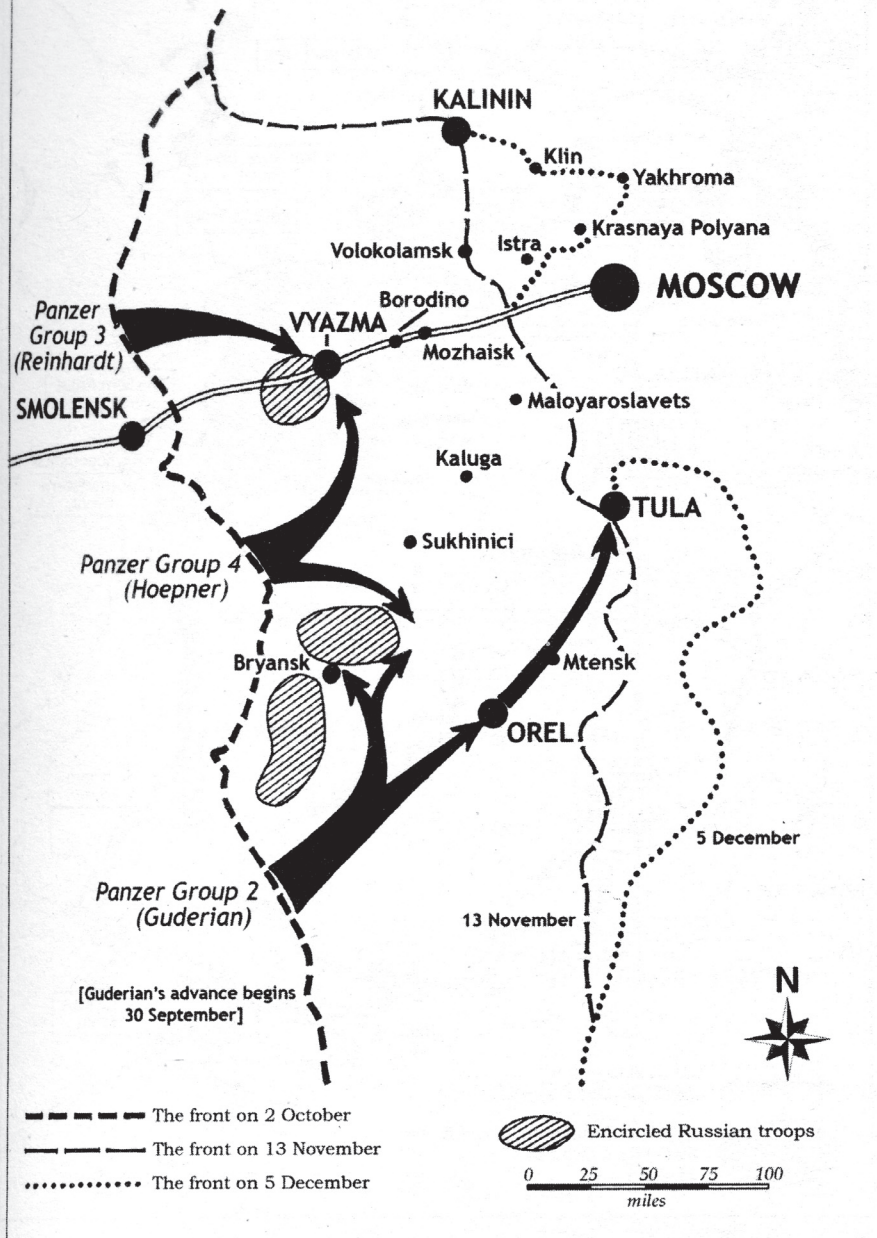
Politically, the Germans would have been welcomed by many people as allies against Stalin's rule: in the Ukraine which had suffered terribly in the 1930s famine and also by the populations of the Baltic States. German brutality put an end to this which cost them the opportunity of recruiting many extra divisions in their campaign against the Red Army.

In 1940-2, whilst Britain stood alone, Germany had received vital aid from Russia, a fact glossed over by Stalin when he pressed for a Second Front. In the summer of 1941, Operation Barbarossa was launched by Hitler as a crusade against Communism. Warned by the British, Stalin had refused to believe that Hitler would turn on him and so the attack and its success took him by surprise. On the first day the Soviet Air Force was neutralised with 2000 planes destroyed. The German Army was fighting a Blitzkrieg war as instigated by General Heinz Guderian. Hitler believed in this approach and had invested in the technical tactical resources it required, e.g. radio communication between all the fighting elements so that tanks, artillery, air force, infantry could all work together. This was not the case for the Soviet defenders. Air support is the key to Blitzkrieg and with no Soviet air force it got off to a good start. Overwhelmed, by September the Red Army had lost 1½-2 million soldiers killed or captured. Western military strategists believed that when the enemy had lost a certain percentage of their forces, they would also lose the will to fight and the country would collapse, but the Germans had miscalculated Russia's ability to sustain these heavy losses.

In the end, every German general blamed Hitler for losing the war but, in October 1941, the majority of Germans thought they had won. Nothing had gone wrong so far, giving them the self-belief that "we can pull everything off." In early October the last great push, Operation Typhoon (the assault on Moscow) began, with German victories at Bryansk and Vyazma with ¾ million Red Army soldiers killed or captured. By 14 October, Kalinin north of Moscow had fallen and the 1st Panzer Division advanced 60 miles against no defences; Moscow looked as if it would fall and on the 16th October evacuation commenced. The



THE GERMAN ADVANCE ON MOSCOW 2 October to 5 December 1941





Soviet Government boarded a train to leave but Stalin got off the train and the Government stayed. He kept his nerve, courage and political instinct to continue resistance. He appointed Marshal Zhukov to command the defences of Moscow with 90,000 troops against 1½ million Germans. Then the weather broke and heavy rainfall turned the roads to quagmires, stalling the advance of German tanks and vehicles. Intelligence reports indicated to Stalin that Japan was planning to attack America and Britain in the Pacific and therefore would be unlikely to attack Russia. He therefore made the crucial decision to recall, via the Trans Siberian Railway, the crack Siberian divisions guarding the eastern frontier to secure the defence of Moscow; these would take three to four weeks to arrive. Meanwhile, vicious fighting continued to gain time for the reinforcements' arrival.

Initially Stalin had not realised that the war was not solely against Communism, but a race war against Jews and Slavs with the ultimate aim of extermination. Changing his approach, Stalin invoked a Great Patriotic War, opening churches, and in early December he held the traditional parade on Moscow's Red Square to celebrate the Bolshevik Revolution, despite the Germans being only 30 miles away. In his speech, Stalin appealed to Russians' love of their Motherland and illustrious past heroes. The basic patriotism of the Russian people and army saved Moscow. By early December 1941, the German advance was brought to a standstill and, with the onset of the severe winter freeze, their equipment malfunctioned due to unsuitable lubricants and overstretched logistics. Despite suffering terribly from the extreme cold, the German Army managed to hang on. This was their first defeat and Hitler could not cope with the effects of the weather and seemingly unlimited manpower of the Red Army. Hitler decided that the war could only be won by his willpower.

In his lecture Dr Jones raised a number of "what ifs". What if Stalin had boarded the evacuation train? Moscow would have fallen and, although a Soviet rump may have continued to fight behind the Urals, the would have effectively been over. In Britain Churchill may have fallen. Hitler may not have declared war on the USA, who would then have fought a separate Pacific War against the Japanese. Dr Jones speculated that Hitler only declared war on America in December 1941 because of the defeat at Moscow, thus making it a World War which Germany could not win.

This article is only a summary of Dr. Jones's lecture of the 1941 winter battle for Moscow. For those who want to go into greater detail I recommend his book, *The Retreat*, the basis of his presentation.

Malcolm Stocker



SIR DAVID LIONEL SALOMONS

Dr. Ian Beavis

8th April, 1011

Dr Beavis began by telling us that the subject of his talk was Sir David Lionel Goldsmid Sterne Salomons, Baronet, 1851 to 1925. His father, Philip Salomons, born in 1796, travelled to the United States as a young man and became a U.S. citizen but, on returning to this country, became an influential figure in the City of London, making a great deal of money destined to be spent by his son on his scientific experiments at Broomhill. Philip held a number of public offices: he was Sheriff of Sussex, a J.P., and had some honorific military roles as well. He probably never lived down the adventure he had as High Sheriff when he was entertaining judges to a banquet in Lewes. Arriving early, he began to explore the county gaol and managed to lock himself into a cell. His cries for help were unnoticed until the banquet was half-way through. In 1850 he married Emma Abigail Montefiore, the mother of David Lionel.

The family's link with the Tunbridge Wells area began in 1829 when the first Sir David Salomon (uncle of Sir David Lionel) purchased the lease of the original small villa of Broomhill and then commissioned the young architect Decimus Burton to rebuild it, creating the building that we know today as the Salomons Centre.

Sir David Lionel Salomons was born in 1851 and studied science at Cambridge, following his childhood interest. He succeeded his uncle as Baronet in 1873, and the young man came to live at Broomhill. When Sir David Lionel moved into Broomhill he set about embellishing the site, first adding the water tower cum astronomical observatory amid a host of well-equipped workshops for his scientific explorations. A visitor commented that these were the finest workshops, prepared for all tasks, in the world. There was also a laboratory and the great science theatre, fully equipped for demonstrations, but used mainly for conferences and discussion of scientific discoveries. The theatre also included the magnificent Welte organ, which has now been restored so that concerts are once again being given there.

Illustrations were shown of the Stable Block, which today are very much visited and admired. These had an innovative automatic feeder which could not only measure out a feed of hay but deliver it to a particular horse just on the pull of a lever. Sir David Lionel also took out patents in electricity, although he always maintained that he was a scientist not an entrepreneur. He nonetheless became chairman of the City's first electricity company, and held several other public offices: he was a magistrate and a member of Kent County Council, but was unsuccessful in standing for Parliament. He was also very interested in the furtherance of women's rights and wrote an address to the Ladies of England.

One of the many slides we were shown was a contemporary cartoon from *Vanity Fair* depicting Sir David Lionel and poking fun at a 3-volume book he had written on electricity, calling it 'Unappetising Stuff'. In fact it was translated into various foreign languages as well as being used as a text book in the United States. He married in 1882 Laura de Sterne and they subsequently had five children, a son and four daughters.



Sir David Lionel's main interest lay, however, in horseless carriages and he was applauded for this because it was thought they would ease the hard labour of horses! Yet his interest in electricity had not waned and his house, Broomhill, was one of the first to be fitted out with electricity long before it came to the main Tunbridge Wells area. He had a great engine house and an accumulator house where batteries could be stored for future use. But his interest in the motor car went back as early as 1874. He played with the idea of an electric car but realised it would not be practical given the technology of the day. Indeed, their development is only really happening today.

Sir David Lionel became a founder member of the Automobile Club of France, the oldest in the world, and helped to organise a number of motor races on the continent. He thought that France had pulled ahead of Britain and he was determined to popularise the motor car for its economic value and also to start up a motor manufacturing industry in Britain.

During his year as Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, he organised the first ever motor show at the agricultural ground in Tunbridge Wells on the 15th October, 1895. As there were only two motor cars in the country he had to invite a few more exhibits from the continent. Some never made the journey so it was a fairly modest show with only six exhibits. But it was hugely influential. Up to 8,000 people came and it was covered by the press from various countries including the United States. The *Courier* asked, 'Will the horses of the future be fed on petroleum instead of oats?' A slide of a fire engine with a Daimler engine made the point that the famous names were there at the very beginning. Sir David Lionel then drove his automobile onto the Eridge Road and the ease with which he threaded his way in and out of the horse-driven carriages amazed all who saw it.

Sir David Lionel was a member of several societies and a philanthropist. He used the science theatre to put on lectures for ordinary people using all the latest technology and he entertained groups from far and wide. One of these was the Croydon Photographic Club who were enormously impressed by the wonderful effects in the theatre all accomplished by one man pushing a button.

Sir David Lionel presented Southborough with its Royal Victoria Hall, to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. He also presented various hospitals with X-ray equipment and opened the 'new electrical room' at the Tunbridge Wells Hospital in 1912.

The local M.P. stated that as a result of his election as mayor, Tunbridge Wells would become the foremost resort of the day. There were two main highlights of his term of office: one, the motor show; and two, the inauguration of the town's first electricity system. The power was switched on by Lady Salomons and then everyone proceeded to the Town Hall to the electricity exhibition which demonstrated its uses other than for lighting. People were amazed by kettles, hair curlers and so on which were on display. Sir David Lionel was asked to stay on for another year as Mayor but declined.

Unfortunately his later years were clouded by tragedy. His only son, David Reginald Salomons was drowned at Gallipoli. He was on board a sinking ship and his last words were, 'I will see my men safe first'. He died a hero, beloved by all who knew him.



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

David Lionel Salomons died in London in April 1925, and was buried at Rusthall, near Tunbridge Wells. He bequeathed his scientific instruments to Cambridge University and eventually his only surviving daughter, Vera Bryce Salomons, presented the estate to Kent County Council. It is now in the hands of Canterbury Christchurch University who have preserved three memento rooms of the Salomons family. It is pleasing to think that one can still visit the house and see memorabilia of the life and times of Sir David Lionel Salomons and his family.

Dinah Lampitt



Caricature by Sly for *Vanity Fair*, 1908



ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS – KEW

Sarah Oldridge

13 May 2011

Our speaker commenced her talk by informing us that she had been at Kew for 27 years and was now working in Adult Education giving talks and organizing courses. As a result of this experience, she was worried she would overrun her allotted time as she had so much she could tell us.

Our speaker then informed us of the meaning of the title of the gardens. **Royal** – started by a Queen, **Botanic** – enquiry into plants, **Gardens** – there were many individual ones and **Kew** – the site is next to the River Thames and Richmond.

Queen Caroline, wife of George II, was a keen gardener and they lived on the Richmond estate. Their son, Frederick, Prince of Wales and his wife, Princess Augusta rented an adjoining estate. Princess Augusta enjoyed gardening whilst Frederick preferred to play the cello. However he died in 1761 of pneumonia having spent too much time in their garden on one occasion. The original gardens were of 9 acres – now 300 acres – and we were told that the site was not suitable for a garden as, being next to the river, the soil is very poor, comprising mainly sand and gravel, which today is kept well composted. The gardens were founded in 1759 and an old tree has been carbon dated to 1761. The famous Chinese Pagoda was built in six months in 1762. It is 163-feet high and originally was very ornate with gold paint together with painted wooden dragons and bells. Unfortunately it is no longer open to the public as it is now too fragile. The first glass house was erected in Princess Augusta's time. Huge amounts of bark were poured in and the plants then planted in the bark which retains heat. Following the death of Frederick, Princess Augusta asked Lord Bute to be her scientific adviser at Kew and William Chambers her architect. It was he who travelled to Asia collecting plants and was responsible for the building of the Pagoda and the Little Temple of the Four Winds which was built on a mound which had been formed from the spoil dug out for the lake.

George III (Farmer George) lived in the White House in 1761, was married to Charlotte and had 16 children, who of necessity, lived in a cottage next door. He was not particularly interested in gardening but preferred agriculture.

Slides showed us many aspects of the various gardens at Kew, including covered walk-ways (laburnum) which were very popular in the seventeenth century as ladies like to keep the sun from their faces. The Nosegay Parterre is filled with herbs and scented flowers as it was customary to carry a sweet-smelling posy to block the smell of unwashed bodies and other unwholesome odours.

Many famous explorers brought back plants for Kew including Joseph Banks who accompanied Captain Cook and became President of the Royal Society. It was Capability Brown who brought the rhododendron to Kew.

In 1820 the Gardens fell into decline, but in 1840 William IV, by Act of Parliament, handed



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



the gardens over to the State. William Hooker became President.

Our speaker then informed us that they have 8 million plants and specimens at Kew together with a library of 1 million botanical books. Expeditions are going on all the time to bring back new plant specimens which are carefully recorded and described before being pressed in newspaper and covered in alcohol before being sealed in a plastic bag for sending to Kew for processing.

A Victorian lady, Marianne North, took up painting at the age of 40 and travelled alone all over the world painting flowers. She presented 800 oil paintings to Kew and also provided a house in which to show them

The first lady gardeners appeared in 1896 from a school in Swanley but they were only admitted when dressed like men!

A conservation area surrounding Queen Charlotte's Cottage was established as an English Wilderness to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

In 1987 The Princess of Wales Glass House was erected which includes ten different climate zones. This is a perfect educational experience for school children as it is contained in one building.

Another slide showed the Giant Amazonian Water Lily which can have a diameter of 8-ft and has been proved to support the weight of a baby (no weight of the baby was given!).

In 1987 1.6 million crocus corms were planted to form a carpet – this was a donation from Readers Digest



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Also in October of 1987, Kew was hit by the hurricane which devastated many parts of England. Kew lost 1500 trees and the gardens closed for a massive clear up. Much of the timber went to artists so that it could live on. Kew has given pride of place to a wooden mural which has been made by a 16 year old schoolboy.

Our speaker said she could not close her lecture without mentioning Wakefield Place. Although owned by the National Trust, Kew leases it and pays for all the running costs. The 500 acres has much better soil conditions and a better climate than at Kew. Kew does, however, own the property which houses the Millennium Seed Bank. It is hoped that seeds of every plant in the world will eventually be stored here for future generations with the exception of acorns and chestnuts on which research is still being undertaken for suitable storage measures.

Kew is funded from a grant from the Government but still has to charge for entry and the revenue from the restaurant, coffee shops all goes to its coffers. Marriages, concerts, corporate entertaining and Friends of Kew also help.

Diane Braybrooke



THE PLANTAGENETS, THE PELHAMS IN THE 14TH CENTURY AND THE LAST SIEGE OF PEVENSEY CASTLE

Hugh Miller

10 June 2011

Mr Hugh Miller, the chairman of the Pevensey and Wretham Historical Society, who has spoken to the Battle and District Historical Society on at least four other occasions, kindly stepped into the breach when the intended speaker fell ill and gave us a most interesting talk.

He started with recording that Edward I, known as Longshanks because of his height, reigned until 1307. He had been well schooled in the arts of government and war and had had many successes, but in the last years of his reign he was an embittered and lonely old man. He was succeeded by his son, Edward II, who was an ineffective king and a bad soldier – routed by the Scots at Bannockburn in 1314. He was despised for his effeminacy and disliked for the expensive favours he lavished on his favourites. In 1327 he was indicted by Parliament because he had “failed in his charge of government”. He was deposed and imprisoned in Berkeley Castle where he was brutally murdered soon afterwards.

His son, Edward III, was only fifteen when he acceded in 1327. In 1328 he married Philippa of Hainault who was an intelligent and wise woman who bore him twelve children. Edward III was particularly eager to assert his rights to Aquitaine. This led to war between England and France in 1337. In 1340 Edward laid claim to the throne of France itself. These events formed the beginning of the Hundred Years’ War.

In 1340 the English annihilated the French fleet at Sluys and Edward prepared to invade France. He embarked 2,400 cavalry and 12,000 archers from the Cinque Ports in 1346. These soldiers were all professionals paid for their services and skills. Landing at Le Havre, they set out for Paris, but learning that an army of French and foreign mercenaries, three times as numerous as their own, was advancing from Paris, the English turned north east to attack Calais.

After crossing the Somme, they took up position on a ridge between two parts of the forest of Crécy. The archers erected sharpened wooden stakes against French cavalry attacks and waited. The English had a great advantage in the long bow, which was unknown on the Continent. With these they could kill an armoured man at 200 yards and shoot so rapidly that three arrows from the same bow could be in the air at the same time. Their opponents’ crossbows had a range of only 50 yards and took much longer to reload.

Silence hung over the armies as on 25th August 1346 the crossbow men advanced to within 200 yards of the longbow men. Then the English and Welsh archers shot their arrows with, in the words of a French observer, “such force and speed that it appeared to snow”. Seeing their crossbow men routed, the French cavalry tried to charge through them to get at the



English, but were impeded in the confusion and mown down by arrows. Thousands of men were killed and many others captured.

Edward III laid siege to Calais which was starved into surrender after eleven months. It remained in English hands until 1558. Present at the siege was a John Pelham from Sussex who was much impressed by one of the first cannon ever to be fired.

Between 1345–50, most of Europe was ravaged by the Black Death which reached England in 1348 where it killed about half the population in under two years. Plague Pits were dug for mass burials and one has been found at Westham.

The Black Death did not stop the war in France and in 1356 there was another great battle at Poitiers which helped to promote the Pelham family to a leading position in Sussex.

The Pelhams came from Hertfordshire, probably about 1300, who acquired land in Warburton and Hailsham, thriving on the profits of the Wealden iron industry. They rented Laughton from the Earl of Oxford and, together with Sir Roger de la Warr, John Pelham accompanied the Earl to war in France.

The Battle of Poitiers was similar tactically to Crécy, the English archers again winning the day. At the end of the battle, the English commander, the Prince of Wales – known as the Black Prince from the colour of his armour – ordered Sir Roger and John Pelham to capture the King of France. This they succeeded in doing so at the gates of Poitiers. They treated their prisoner in so chivalrous a way that the King presented the scabbard of his sword to Sir Roger and his buckle to Pelham. The buckle became the badge of the Pelham family and can still be seen carved in stone on several buildings in Sussex.

In 1372, John of Gaunt, younger brother of the Black Prince, and the richest man in England, gave Pevensey Castle to the Pelham family as a reward for their services. John Pelham was made Constable of the Castle.

In 1377 Edward III died and as the new king, Richard II, was only eleven years old, John of Gaunt became Regent.

At this point, Mr Miller began to refer to a medieval book, *Dame Joan of Pevensey*, which is a mixture of fable and (probable) fact.

According to a romantic story told in the book, John Pelham's son, also John, boarded a great ship of "eastern origin" in the Channel and rescued Sir Thomas de Lescure and his beautiful daughter Joan. Sir Thomas's château had been stolen from him, so the young John Pelham rode for two days across Normandy with Sir Thomas and his daughter to recover it. Pelham fought a victorious duel with the usurper and subsequently married the beautiful Joan.

The book then moves on to 1399 when it says that John Pelham the younger who had succeeded his father as Constable of Pevensey, went to Pontefract in Yorkshire to support Henry Bolinbroke against the forces of Richard II. An army of Sussex, Surrey and Kentish men, supporters of King Richard besieged Pevensey, which Dame Joan defended with



the aid of the cannon which her father-in-law had admired at the siege of Calais 52 years earlier. The legend is that she fired the cannon herself, repulsing – and killing – many of her attackers. The siege was continued and according to the book, large stones were hurled at the castle by catapults from the towers of Pevensey and Westham churches. Dame Joan wrote a letter describing her plight which reached her husband, Sir John, at Pontefract. He came to her rescue in the nick of time, all the animals in the castle (including Dame Joan's horse) having been eaten by the hungry defenders.

What really happened was less romantic. By 1399 Richard II had become very unpopular. At first admired for the courage he had shown as a boy in confronting Wat Tyler in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, his use of his powers of patronage, his extravagance and his dispossession of many of the great nobles caused many clashes with Parliament. He banished Henry Bolinbroke, John of Gaunt's son and his heir to the throne.

In 1399 Richard II went to Ireland and, in his absence, Richard Bolinbroke returned from France and led a successful rebellion aided by John Pelham. At Pontefract a letter was received signed JP, but modern scholars are convinced that this was John Pelham's own signature and not his wife's. In the fanciful book, he was described as Sir John, but he was not in fact knighted until after Henry IV's coronation.

The affectionate and flowery nature of the letter (which was only found in 1756) was often used in medieval letters by a man to his superiors. The fact that the church towers of Pevensey and Westham were too far from the castle to be within range for the most powerful catapult is further proof of the inaccuracy of the book.

However, Pevensey was besieged in the summer of 1399 by supporters of Richard II from Kent, Surrey and Sussex and was relieved by troops sent by Bolingbroke.

Richard II was imprisoned in Pontefract Castle and never seen again. Bolingbroke became Henry IV who, following his coronation which John Pelham attended as his swordbearer, made Pelham a Knight of the Bath. Pelham settled at Laughton and acquired one sixth of Sussex which he represented in the House of Commons. He was appointed a Privy Councillor and Ambassador to France. He died in 1428 and was buried in Robertsbridge Abbey "full of honours".



Richard Moore

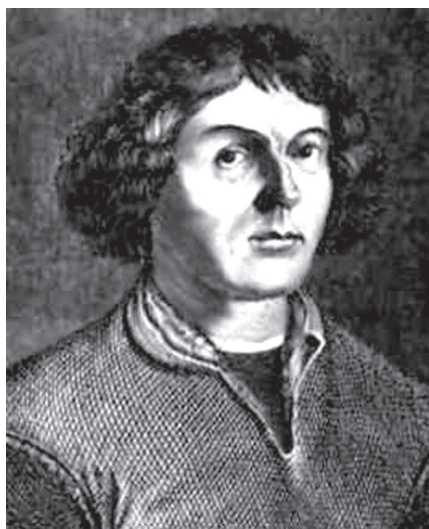
Pevensey Castle



THE WORLD OF COPERNICUS

Ivan Crowe

8th July 2011



Mr Crowe kindly agreed to lecture the Society at short notice because the scheduled speaker had to cancel because of illness. Mr Crowe spoke both about Copernicus himself and the world in which lived, 1473–1543. This is an edited version of the lecture he gave.

It was a time of great change and technical innovation. Printing had just been invented which enabled knowledge to be spread more widely and quickly than before. It was the period of the Renaissance, when scholars looked back to the knowledge of the ancients, particularly the Greeks and the Romans. In 1453 the Turks had finally captured Constantinople, an important repository of learning and books. Many of these were rescued and disseminated west into the rest of Europe. The art of paper-making had reached Europe from China. Experiments in glass lenses had been taking place at least since the twelfth century and spectacles were in use. There was considerable contact in Sicily and Spain, for example, between Christians and Muslims, who were far more advanced in the study of science. European scholars therefore had access to Muslim and oriental learning. It was a time of intellectual, political and religious ferment as the Reformation took hold in the early 1500s.

Nikolaus Copernicus was born in Silesia in Torun, a member of the Hanseatic League on the River Vistula and so had wide trading contacts with the rest of Europe. Although Silesia had been in German-speaking control in the past (and was to become so again), at this time it was part of Poland and the centre of dispute between the King of Poland and the Teutonic Knights, both of whom claimed it as theirs. The Teutonic Knights thought that it had been promised to them as a reward for suppressing pagan Baltic people. The town of Torun backed the Polish king and successfully resisted a siege by the Knights.

Nikolaus's father was a well-to-do metal worker – the name derives from the word for copper – which we know in its Latinized form. Because his father (and then his uncle) could afford it, Nikolaus and his brother had a good education. Copernicus senior died when his son was only 10 and his uncle Lucas Watzenrode, an important priest, became his guardian. His uncle eventually became Prince-Bishop of Ermland. Thanks to his uncle,



after his early schooling in Torun, Nikolaus became a student at Cracow university where he studied mathematics and astronomy and his interest was sparked; at the university there were various astronomical instruments with which he became familiar. [In 1495] his uncle appointed him as a canon in the Cathedral Chapter of Frombork (Frauenberg) in Ermland/Wamia and thus secured him an income for life. The following year he left for Italy to study canon law (essential for his position in the church). [There he lodged with the professor of astronomy and made his first observations. He was also able to learn Greek. This enabled him to read many classical texts on astronomy that had not been translated into Latin. He returned to Frombork but went back to Italy, this time to study medicine.] He returned, not to Frombork, but to live with his uncle as his private physician.

Nikolaus was an excellent example of the Renaissance man; he not only knew several languages but had also studied law and medicine. At that time, when the plague and diseases like leprosy were common, the Church ran the hospitals and looked after the sick. Although astrology and other superstitions were used as an aid in treating illness, medical knowledge was further advanced than we might imagine, for example, invasive surgery was practised, the use of hemlock as an anaesthetic used and the study of the human body by dissection was part of medical learning.

At this period, the generally-held astronomic theory, based on Ptolemy's theories, was geocentric: the sun went round the earth which was the centre of the universe. This belief was held and enforced by the Catholic Church possibly because it put the church at the centre of the universe. Earlier Greek scholars had put forward heliocentric (i.e. the sun as the centre) theories, but had been unable to square these with the Aristotelian view of the universe. Mr Crowe went on to explain the different stages of the development of theories about the earth's position in relation to the moon and other planets, illustrated with slides. Others had attempted with some success to estimate the sizes of the planets and the distances between them and the earth. Copernicus was familiar with their work.

It is not known exactly when Copernicus became convinced by the heliocentric view. Any one putting forward views that went against orthodox church teaching had to be very careful.

Copernicus returned to Frombork [in 1510] where he could pursue his astronomical studies more vigorously and stayed there until he died. He lived in a fortified building which he defended against an attack by the Teutonic Knights in a further dispute over sovereignty with the Polish crown. His unorthodox views were either not widely known or were ignored by the Papal authorities. He later accepted a commission from the Pope to work out a new calendar, for example.

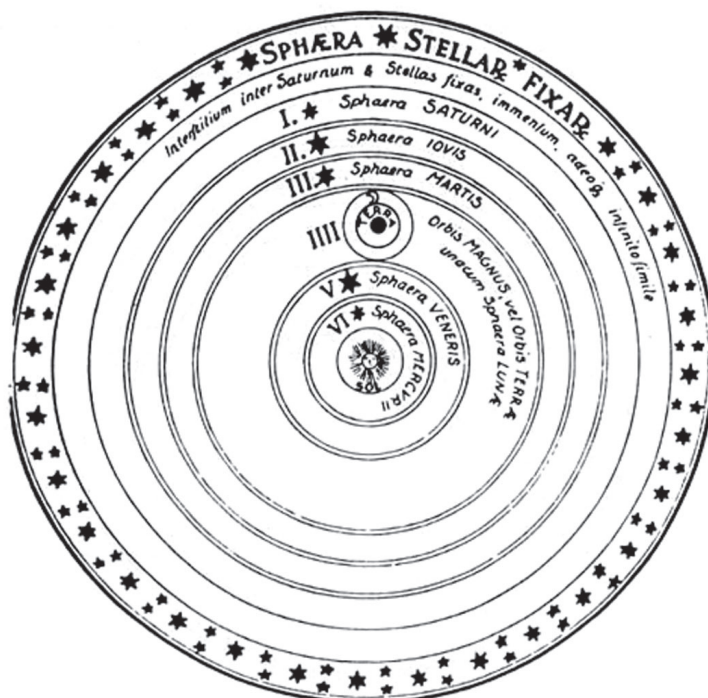
It was in Frombork that Copernicus used some of the instruments such as the triquetrum, which he had originally come across at Cracow, as he refined his conclusions about the universe. Mr Crowe described some of the stages in this process during which Copernicus was writing down his observations and theories. The problem was that the distances to be measured were so unimaginably vast and the tools so basic and crude, it was impossible to achieve any degree of accuracy.

Copernicus had still not proved the heliocentric theory to his own satisfaction when his



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

book, [*On the Revolutions*,] was taken to the printers as he lay on his death bed. However, this conclusion was clear to others from what he had written, so one of his friends, Osiander, no doubt so that the book would avoid the attention of the Church, wrote a preface to it saying that it simply described the movements of the planets more accurately. The book was brought to Copernicus in 1543 but he died without reading the preface. And, of course, he never knew that his work laid the basis for the work of later astronomers and general acceptance of the heliocentric view of the universe.



Throughout his talk, Mr Crowe showed slides of diagrams demonstrating the various theories about the universe and of many of the people and places he mentioned.

Hugh Arbuthnott