

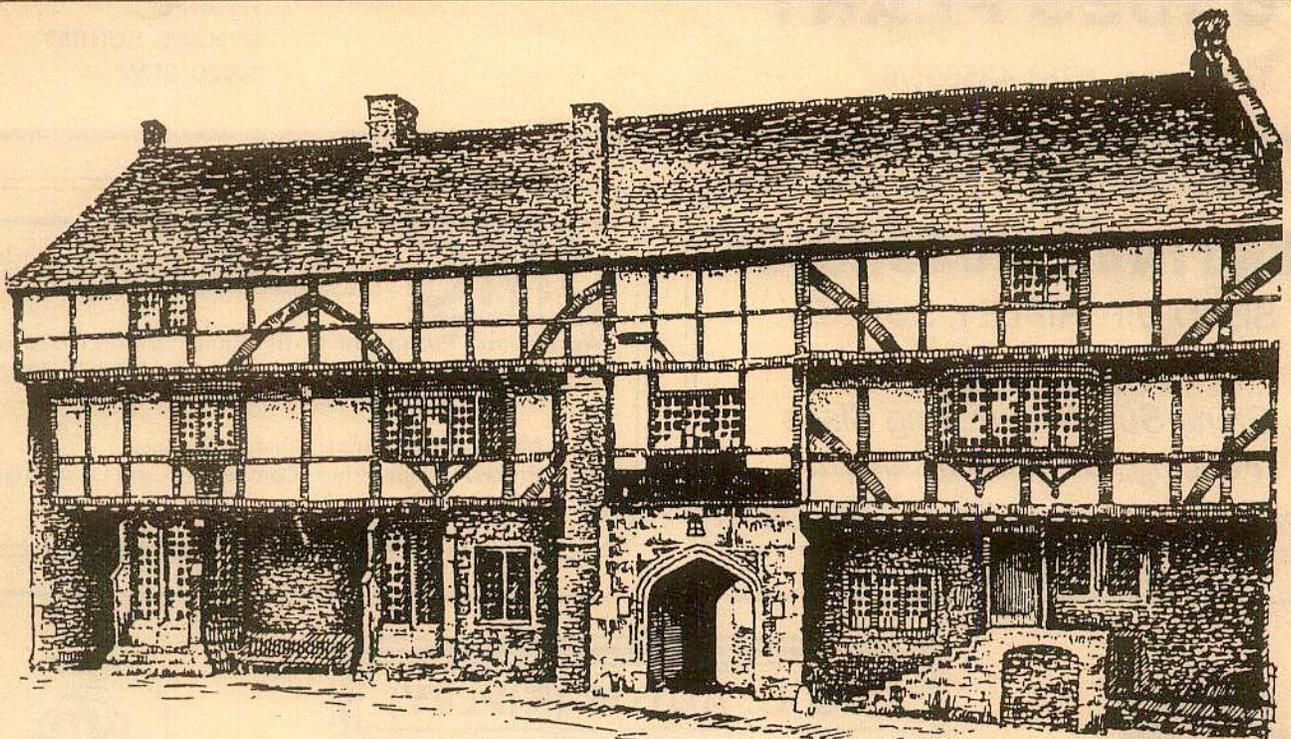
Send E Ripley History Society



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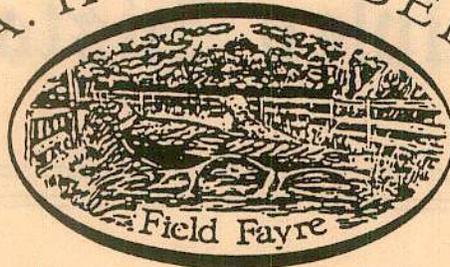
Newsletter No.105

July/August 1992



The George Inn

A. H. CONISBEE

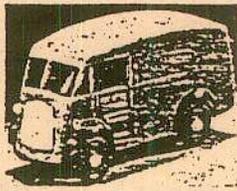


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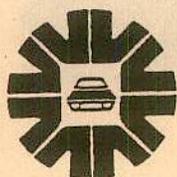
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Send & Ripley History Society

Established 1975 as Send History Society

Registered Charity No 296324

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The Manor House, Send Marsh Green, Ripley, Woking GU23 6JL (Gfd 224876)

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Newsletter No 105

July/August 1992

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Cover Illustration: This shows the George Inn, believed to have been built in 1223, at Norton St Philip, Somerset.

EDITOR'S COMMENT

As one would expect, the major activities of the Society have centred upon the need to raise funds for the "new" Local History Centre. A great deal of time and effort by the Committee and its members has been devoted in the last two months to this activity, and a glance at the forthcoming events will show at least two other additional functions devoted to this purpose. Too late to be included in this Newsletter is a barbecue on Friday, 7 August, to be held by kind permission of Anne and Les Bowerman at the Manor House, Send Marsh. On this occasion the grand prize draw will take place and no doubt this will be fully reported in the next issue.

The work of the History Society goes on, as is evidenced by the reports on visits to places of interest and articles on matters of historical relevance to Send & Ripley History Society.

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

Mrs Valerie S Pearson (granddaughter of Alf Dibble, former landlord of the Anchor, Ripley), Green-Vale, Pencader, Dyfed SA39 9BS.

Mr B M Hampton (rejoined), 4 Prews Cottages, Tannery Lane, Send.

Mr Cliff Webb, 8 Heather Close, New Haw, Addlestone KT15 3PF

Mr & Mrs R M McCreton, Waterside Cottage, Milestone Close, Ripley GU23 7EP.

Exactly 100 paid-up double subscriptions have been received and 7 singles, making a total membership of 267.

L G Bowerman

MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS

We are grateful to Mrs Hope Sanger for the donation of two World War II gas masks and one helmet (WW I?), and also to Mr Jack Richardson for a Hand-mill or grinder mounted on a beam (c 1800?), which came from Collins' Bakery, Ripley.

WEDNESDAY, 20 MAY - EVENING VISIT TO FARNHAM

It was a beautiful summer evening when about two dozen members gathered in Wagon Yard, Farnham, for the first of this year's outings. We split into two groups, and were ably conducted by two staff members from Farnham Museum. The town is said to be one of the finest Georgian towns in the country, with many unspoilt buildings, and, on the hill, the ancient Castle (it was at one time the home of the Bishops of Winchester), presiding over the whole. Castle Street used to be the site of the great country fairs, the modern equivalent being fruit and vegetable stalls.

We were taken through many of the narrow back-streets, bright with flower baskets, to the churchyard, where lies William Cobbett, famous for his "Rural Rides", an account of country life at the time. He was born in the town in 1763 in what is now the "William Cobbett" pub.

We called at the "Bush" hotel, to see the sundial on the ceiling of one of the downstairs rooms, not as odd as it sounds, as at one time the sunlight was reflected from a pond outside the window, but that alas is long gone.

Off the High Street are many lanes and courtyards, inviting little nooks and crannies unnoticed unless one is on foot.

At 9.30 pm several of us repaired to the nearest pub for liquid refreshment, much needed after this delightful and stimulating walk around Farnham.

Audrey Sykes

14 JUNE 1992 - A VISIT TO THE TUDOR KITCHENS OF HAMPTON COURT

On one of the hottest afternoons of the summer ten or so members paid a visit to the newly restored kitchens at Hampton Court. The idea for the visit was seeded in November 1991 when Dr Simon Thurley, of English Heritage and Curator of Hampton Court Palace, gave a scintillating lecture at the Surrey Local History Symposium held at the University of Surrey.

The presentation of the displays employs the very latest technology and one is guided around with individual tape recorders, which are simple to use and extremely informative. One of several innovative features is that wherever possible real exhibits are used, and there are wonderful smells of fresh herbs permeating the kitchen. One of the most startling revelations is that the Tudors were avid carnivores and ate far more meat than we do today. The spits used to roast meat were turned by little kitchen boys, and there is an excellent live display of the fire and system of spits that would be used to do this. Some of you may have recently seen Dr Thurley on television, escorting the Queen around the newly restored Royal Apartments on her recent visit to the flower festival at Hampton Court. I imagine that these will also be well worth a visit, and if you have not been to Hampton Court for some time, it's to be recommended.

Tony Medlen

PHOTOGRAPHIC GROUP

An exhibition of photographs was mounted, showing many features of St Mary's Church, Send, and displayed in the gallery, in conjunction with the flower festival which was held there between 10 and 12 July 1992.

Timothy King, Vicar of Send, in his introduction in the programme, states that "The proceeds from this flower festival will go to the Church Restoration Fund. As such it will be spent to help keep another 'thing of beauty' alive in this village, a building which has stood here for over seven hundred years."

This event was very successful and raised in excess of £900.

Editor

FIRES AT SEND COURT FARM

By John Slatford

We recently received a letter from Mr Martin Whitney, living in France, with some questions about his family history research into the name Eatwell. He had come across several references with Ripley connections. In his letter he also asked about a fire at Send Court Farm in the early 1930s.

We were able to answer most of his questions, and whilst writing back to him, also mentioned that we knew of the Send Court fire. Back came a reply with a blow by blow account of how the fire started; Mr Whitney was the person who, quite accidentally, was responsible. It makes fascinating reading and he has very kindly agreed to its reproduction in our Newsletter. By strange coincidence, Mr Whitney's second letter arrived just a few days before another serious fire at the same spot. Members will no doubt have seen the brief report and photo in the Surrey Advertiser of 28 February 1992. History definitely repeats itself.

Les Bowerman made some notes in 1975, after talking to Ron Sex and Jim Oliver, about the 1933 fire. Ron had, it seems, been carrying the newspaper cutting around for more than forty years.

Also Jane Bartlett tells us about a record in the Send Fire Brigade Minute Book dated 12 October 1933. It refers to an account sent to the Parish Council for attendance at Send Court Farm.

"43 hours for officers and 247 hours for 7 firemen.

"Total: £61.19s.0d."

We have been successful in finding the Surrey Advertiser report of October 14 1933. This is reproduced on pages 6 and 7, together with Les Bowerman's notes and the Advertiser report of February 28 this year.

The following is a report by Mr Whitney of Les Portes, Mainsat 23700, France.

"SEND COURT FARM - THE BARN IS BURNED 1931?"

"From 1928 I was an apprentice with Messrs Phillips Mills & Co Ltd; of Hester Road, Battersea Bridge, and on occasions I was sent to do work with other tradesmen at one of the two farms owned by the Managing Director, Mr Eric Phillips.

"Although we had our suspicion that these were unofficial from the way we were told keep quiet about where you are going, the instruction came from our manager who was our 'boss' and with whom one asked no questions. On this occasion when I was about 17 so it would be about 1931, three of us were sent to the farm he owned near Send church to prepare the farm for sale.

"I started with the Fordson tractor that ran on paraffin, but was normally started by using petrol. Having given it a service and made some adjustments to make sure that it started and ran well and touched up the paintwork, I put it in the centre of the barn and started working on the 'stationary engine' that drove the chaff cutting and beet and swede shredding machines. The pieces of hay or straw from this cutting machine had blown around and settled over everything and rested on all flat surfaces of the timbers. The barn which was about 30 feet by 60 feet or possibly more as 60 years have passed since this event and my judgement of distance has never been very good, was built of oak if I

remember correctly, had a small 'lean-to' shed with a corrugated iron roof attached at one end which housed the stationary engine.

"This engine was of the very old type that had 'tube' ignition and there was no sparking plug or magneto. The gas inside the single cylinder was ignited by the heat from a platinum tube that protruded inside the cylinder from the outside and was heated with a 'blow-lamp' which transferred the heat to the end inside the cylinder. There was no carburettor and the supply of paraffin fuel was regulated by a 'governor' consisting of rotating bob-weights which operated a needle inside a jet by raising it when more fuel was required.

"There was no starting handle and the engine was started by spinning the flywheel and bouncing it over compression, when in theory the fuel inside the cylinder would be ignited by the heated platinum tube and the engine would 'fire' and then continue to run. The heat from each explosion was sufficient to keep the tube hot enough for the engine to 'fire' repeatedly. The speed of this type of engine was very slow and you could count the revolutions as it 'fired' each time and this would be about 200 revolutions per minute.

"The engine was mounted on two pieces of timber standing on edge so that there was a space of some inches under the engine to raise it off the floor to allow clearance for the flywheel. I had cleared the dirt from the engine with paraffin but little did I realise that also under the engine were many bits of chaff that had been soaked in oil droppings from the engine mixed with paraffin that had dripped when I cleaned it and the whole made an ideal 'lamp wick'.

"The crankshaft of the engine was exposed and there was a constant drip feed oil container on the 'big end' and main bearings, so I started to fill the oil can to top up these while the blowlamp was in position heating the platinum tube, then I noticed that fuel was dripping from the 'governor' and falling through the flame from the blowlamp which was setting fire to these droplets of fuel and I saw a flame coming from underneath the engine.

"There were two brass Pyrene fire extinguishers in clips on the wall and I took one and squirted it at the flame, or I should say, aimed it at the flame and pumped the handle but nothing came out so I took the other one and tried again with the same result. The extinguishers were full but the jets had been blocked by corrosion I presumed, though I did not stop to investigate at that moment and gave a shout to the other men who came with sacks and together we put the sacks and shovelled earth over the engine to quell the flames, but the straw chaff underneath soaked with the old engine oil and paraffin was a very good wick and although it would have burned out after a few minutes the intensity of the flame was such that it rose to the low sloping galvanised iron roof which deflected the flames on to the barn. From there the chaff sitting on the ledges caught fire and it started to run along the sides of the barn and one man went off to phone the fire brigade.

"Meanwhile with the intention of rescuing the tractor I ran across to it, set the controls and gave the starting handle an almighty swing and even though it was set to run on paraffin, not petrol, the engine started so I leapt into the driver's seat and released the clutch, but as I went to put it into gear I looked up and saw that the flames had run all around the walls of the barn and I was surrounded by them. I was wearing bib and brace overalls with the sleeves rolled up and I could feel the heat on my bare arms and not having had experience of this sort of thing before I panicked and got out of the barn into the open air. However as soon as I was outside the panic subsided and I realised that I would have had enough time to have brought the Fordson out and started to go back in to get it, but was stopped by the other men who would not let me enter. I still think I could have rescued it, but as the young apprentice I was in the habit of doing what I was told, in those days

instructions that were not obeyed resulted in a clump on the head or a 'thick ear' as it was called.

"After a while the local volunteer fire brigade came in an old Morris commercial van containing some hoses which they connected to the fire hydrants though the water pressure was low so there was little force to the jets that came out. Meanwhile one of the eight haystacks which were situated close to the barn started smouldering and despite the water from the hoses, burst into flames. Shortly afterwards the official fire engine from Guildford arrived which had a pump which could have increased the pressure from the water mains and been more effective. However it seemed that the local lads thought that the professional help was not required and the fire engine went away.

"I must admit that to me it was very exciting to be so close to such a huge blaze, although I was rather apprehensive of what would happen to me for having started it. Eventually when the fire died down the barn and seven haystacks disappeared, and all that remained was one haystack, apart from the debris.

"Since then I have had a great respect for fire knowing how quickly it can happen and spread, also that a fire extinguisher that doesn't work is no better than not having one at all. Then one day, a week or so later, I was at home sleeping as I was then working on the 'night shift' and the assurance assessor came to the house to ask me questions as to what had occurred. I was never a George Washington 'who never told a lie', but could not think of an excuse that would get me off the hook, so I told him what had happened. I have since wondered whether the reporter from the local paper took a photograph of the result of the fire.

"No doubt the fire assessor made many inquiries and found that we were there unofficially and the result we heard later was that at a Board meeting of Phillips Mills & Co Mr Eric Phillips was given his marching orders and was no longer Managing Director or even on the Board. He later started another firm of Imports and Exports at a wharf at the end of Hester Road.

"Then we heard that the local fire brigade at Send was disbanded and it didn't take much imagination to guess why.

"It has since struck me as ironic that the only person to profit, or at least not to lose by my experience was myself when my tools, which were destroyed in the fire, were replaced by a new kit. There must be a moral here somewhere."

NOTES OF CONVERSATIONS RE 1933 FIRE AT SEND COURT.

12 June 1975 with Ron Sex: His father was in charge of the fire engine when there was a big fire in several haystacks at Send Court Farm. Ron drove the engine, as he was the only one available at the time who could drive. The Guildford brigade also came, but Send brigade sent them away saying they could cope, although Send only had hoses for stand-pipes and Guildford had hoses which would reach the river. There was much bitterness over this, as a result of which the Send brigade was disbanded. Joe Baigent's brother was annoyed about Ron driving the engine whilst not a member of the brigade.

Jim said his father was just buying the farm in 1933 and the stacks had been valued. He also said the fire was caused by a barn engine back-firing and catching fire.

Les Bowerman

SURREY ADVERTISER

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1933

SERIOUS FARM FIRE AT SEND

BUILDINGS AND RICKS
DESTROYED

GUILDFORD BRIGADE'S EXPERIENCE

COULD THEY HAVE BEEN OF USE?

Considerable comment has arisen concerning an incident in a serious farm fire at Send, which broke out on Thursday afternoon, and was still burning at midday yesterday (Friday).

The fire has destroyed farm buildings, implements, and ricks within a stone's throw of Send Parish Church, namely, at Send Court Farm, which is occupied by Mr. Eric S. Phillips, as the tenant of the Misses Lancaster.

The "incident" occurred on the arrival of the Guildford Fire Brigade, who had received, through the police, a telephone message from a person who, it is alleged, stated that Send Church was on fire. The Guildford Brigade are not responsible for fire protection in Send, but in view of the interest of the building stated to be involved, Mr. G. Hindson, who is third officer of the brigade, turned out with the country fire engine. The call was received at 1.17 p.m., and the engine left in four minutes, arriving at the fire some 10 minutes later. The brigade found the volunteer Send Brigade getting to work with a hydrant, and, after discussion as to whether or not they should assist by pumping from the river, they were informed that their help was not required, the Chief Officer of the Send Brigade (Mr. S. Mathis) considering that his men were capable of coping unaided with the outbreak. Accordingly the Guildford Brigade returned to Guildford.

It has been stated that the Guildford Brigade were not received in a friendly manner, and Mr. G. Hickmii, captain of the brigade, was yesterday (Friday) reluctant to discuss the matter. All he would say was, "We were told that our services were not required. Certainly the manner in which it (the remark) was made was not the manner one would expect. We are not responsible for fire protection in Send, but answered the call, and reported when we arrived in the usual way."

He agreed that their machine, had it been used, would have been capable of pumping 400 to 500 gallons of water a minute, and could have been used from the river.

EIGHT RICKS INVOLVED

The fire destroyed a large barn and eight ricks—one of straw, one of bracken, and six of hay—which stood in an enclosure flanking the lane leading to the church. Only one small hayrick could be saved. The barn was rapidly reduced to charred ruin, and the firemen could do no more than prevent the flames from reaching adjoining property.

The fire is believed to have started between midday and one o'clock from an oil engine in a "lean-to" next to the barn and cowshed.

A bull, the only live stock in danger, was released by Mr. Clark, the farm bailiff, who lives at Send Court Farm. The owner of the farm lives at Wimbledon, and was therefore unaware of the fire.

SEND BRIGADE'S ARRIVAL

The Send Fire Brigade was called, and the motor tender hurried to the farm, but the fire had already assumed serious proportions, and the brigade concentrated on efforts to prevent a spread. The Chief Officer, Mr. G. Baigent (second officer), and members of the brigade were helped by energetic volunteers. They took water from a hydrant in the road, close to the ricks, but found the force of water was not great enough to make much impression on the blaze. The hoses were used to damp the small rick, preventing that from sharing the fate of the straw, bracken and hay, which blazed intensely all around it and caused alarm to neighbours, who hastened with pails of water to throw over the wood fencing on the other side of the road.

When the Guildford Fire Brigade came to offer help, Mr. Mathis, who was unaware of anyone having called there, explained that the Send contingent had already assured itself that the blaze would not spread. The roof of the barn (by this time a smouldering framework) had already collapsed, and the ricks were burning fiercely. The Send Chief Officer, seeing that nothing more could be done than to prevent the adjoining property from becoming involved, did not feel that further help was required.

INTERVIEW WITH BAILIFF

Apparently this feeling was not shared by onlookers, and in conversation with a "Surrey Advertiser" representative yesterday Mr. Clark, the bailiff, said: "They are all wondering why the Guildford brigade was sent away. Everybody thinks that if Guildford had stayed it would have been got under control quicker. Two ricks at the back, 80 tons of hay, at least, did not catch sight until about 20 minutes after the Guildford brigade had gone."

Mr. Clark contended that the Send brigade had not enough pressure to pour water on top of the stacks, yet the Guildford brigade could have got water from the river. Two hoses were taken from the hydrant, but while one was working round the stacks, the other hose had to be shut off to get pressure. He thought that if the Guildford brigade had been allowed to remain the last two ricks would have been saved.

"A fire assessor for the insurance company," added the bailiff, "was not satisfied with what was done."

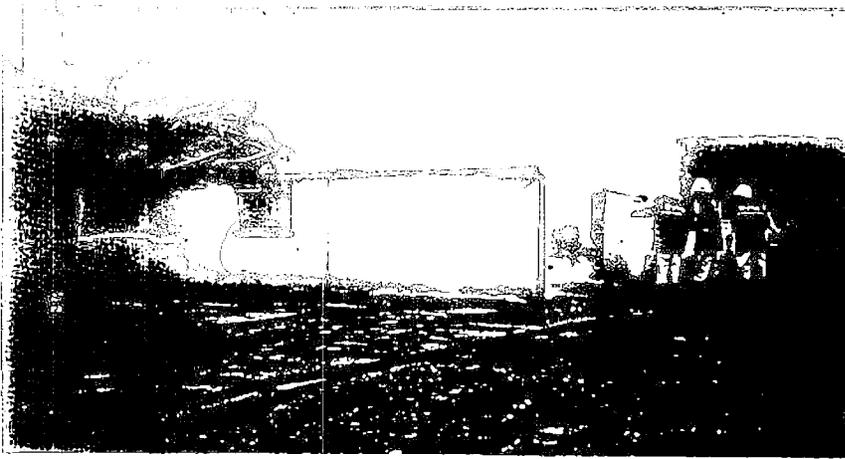
In conversation with a "Surrey Advertiser" reporter, the chief of the Send brigade was emphatic in the opinion that as the flames had such a firm grip on the property, the Guildford firemen would have been unable to have done more than his brigade in preventing an extension of the trouble. He was unaware that the Guildford brigade were not satisfied with the decision that their services were not needed.

MACHINERY RUINED

Inside the barn were implements and machinery, such as an angold and chaff cutter, and a motor tractor.

Mr. Martin Whiting, one of the employees, tried in vain to get the tractor out of the barn, but the heat was so intense, and the danger of falling material so imminent, that he was forced to leave it. The bodywork of a four-wheeled farm cart was destroyed.

The Send firemen stayed on duty at night, damping down the smouldering and diminishing heaps of material to guard against further outbreaks.



The fire at Arabian Stables, Send, last Saturday that destroyed 10 tons of hay. Picture by Mark Jones, of Guildford Fire and Rescue Service.

Hay destroyed

TEN tons of hay valued at £600 went up in smoke when fire broke out at a Send stables on Saturday. Guildford fire crews were called to Arabian Stables, Church Lane, Send, at 10.45 a.m. No one was injured but the hay barn was destroyed and three farm buildings were slightly damaged.

SURREY
ADVERTISER
FEBRUARY 28,
1932

**SUNDAY, 19 JULY - VISIT TO NORTON St PHILIP
AND THE AMERICAN MUSEUM NEAR BATH**

A group of 20 members arrived at the car park adjoining the 13th century George Inn at Norton St Philip at 11 am. The group were met by a local resident of the village, Richard Taylor, at one time official guide to Bath and now the Chairman of the Norton St Philip Village Preservation Society. After introducing Richard Taylor, Ken Bourne provided some background information on the reason for the visit to Norton, apart from being a very convenient stop for refreshments.

Ela was born at Amesbury in 1187, the daughter of William d'Evreux, 2nd Earl of Salisbury, who was himself descended from Walter d'Evreux, Count of Rosmar (surnamed Sarisberi), who came to England with William, Duke of Normandy (the Conqueror) in 1066. Ela inherited vast estates, among them the Manors of Hinton and Norton St Philip, when her parents died. She later married William Longspee when about twelve years old, William becoming 3rd Earl of Salisbury through his wife's title. This William was a son of Fair Rosamund, mistress to Henry II. As was the custom, he was treated with the same consideration as the legitimate offspring by both patrons, Richard Coeur de Lion and his brother, John. William and Ela appear to have been happily married, producing four sons and four daughters. Both were pious and very devoted to the Church. When William died in 1226, his will included a substantial bequest to the Carthusian monks. Ela carried out her husband's wishes by assisting the monks to found a priory at Hinton, which also included lands at Norton St Philip.

The George Inn is believed to have been the accommodation used by the monks whilst building the priory and subsequently used by them as a guesthouse. In 1240 Ela founded the abbey at Lacock as a religious foundation of women Augustinians, a popular and less austere order than the Carthusians. This is the same organisation as the Augustinians who founded Newark Priory in Ripley.

The tour began down the narrow High Street between tightly packed houses constructed from mellow stone, with stone windows and mullions and stone or pantiled roofs. Originally many of the buildings were timber-framed, now concealed beneath the exterior stone facing, two of which had been discovered as being of cruck timber construction. The earliest houses were c 1460. A small narrow alleyway to the right led past an old iron-barred window, the site of the village lock-up, and downhill towards a field at the back of the houses known as The Butts. This name refers to the mediaeval practice of using such areas as a training ground for archers, who were so effective with their longbows at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

At the far end of the field is situated the late 13th century church, built in the typical Somerset style, with a 70-foot West Tower surmounted by pinnacles. The church was much altered during restoration, begun in 1847 by Sir Gilbert Scott. The oldest visible fabric is the South Porch - early 14th century - still with original barrel roof with carved escutcheons and dentil moulding. Inside, the chancel also exhibited a very fine barrel roof, the South Aisle being the oldest part of the church, coeval with the porch. Above the South Door hang the Royal Arms of Charles II. The remains of some 13th century glass is located in the North Aisle window. There are many features of interest, further explained by an excellent guide, but time did not permit, unfortunately, studying these at length. There is, however, an oak church chest, dated 1634. On leaving it was noted by our guide that the churchyard contained many burials resulting from the battles fought in Norton St Philip during the Civil War, and subsequently in 1685, when the Duke of Monmouth fought a

successful battle in Norton St Philip, killing many of the King's troops.

The tour continued through the lower part of the village from the church gate towards Fairfield, an area in the village where there has been a right to hold a fair twice a year from the 13th century, originally for the sale of wool, an important commodity, to which the village owed its prosperity in the middle ages.

Among other notable features of the village is the 13th century stone Manor House, built by the Carthusian monks and home of the Reeve, secular head of the village. Nearby is a tithe barn, now a private dwelling. A Tudor dovecot, built to accommodate over seven hundred pigeons and in an excellent state of preservation proved fascinating. We are grateful to the present owner, Geof Roe, for the opportunity to inspect this building internally.

Among the many other interesting features described by our guide, Lyde Green is an area which is the only common land in the village and it developed due to a natural spring. Nearby is Bloody Lane, so named after a battle on 26 June 1685 between the Duke of Monmouth's men and Royalist troops, which was fought at the top of the lane in very wet weather. The Royalists lost many men, and the wounded and dying, through loss of blood, mixed with rainwater, turned the lane red, hence its name. The Royalists lost 80 and the Duke lost 18 men. An unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of the Duke of Monmouth whilst staying at the George, and subsequently the Duke went on to Sedgemoor, fighting the famous battle which resulted in his capture and later execution.

In due course our party returned to the George Inn, our guide noting the bricked-up archway beneath the external steps, which is the village end of a tunnel known to exist between the monastery and the George.

Following an excellent lunch at the inn and due thanks to our guide, the group made their way to the **American Museum at Claverton Manor**.

This house was built in 1820, during the reign of George IV, in the classical style in Bath stone. It is situated about two miles from Bath and is the only museum in England devoted to the history and arts of the United States. Many of the exhibits refer to early Colonial settlement and the considerable influence of the English and European settlers by way of their lifestyle, buildings and traditions.

The museum contains a series of furnished rooms, many fitted with original panelling and floorboards brought from houses in the United States and reconstructed within the Manor House. These rooms range in date from the late 17th to the mid 19th century and in cultural tradition from the English Puritans to the Spanish colonists of New Mexico.

The museum is also famous for its very fine collection of over four hundred Quilts and Coverlets. Some very fine examples were on display, dating from the 1800s.

The skill of Patchwork (the sewing together of pieces of material, usually of dissimilar patterns, to form an overall design) and quilting skills were brought to America by the early settlers and a great tradition of patchwork and quilting developed, subsequently to a much greater extent than in the country of origin.

An excellent booklet by Shiela Betterton, entitled "More Quilts and Coverlets", (available from the museum) describes and illustrates a selection of patchwork and quilts from this collection.

There were many other exhibits relating to Indian and Mexican culture, and several members were delighted to round off the tour of the museum with a visit to "Mrs Small's" Kitchen to sample some of the American cookies.



GIBBS IN RIPLEY
- THE EARLY DAYS

Until its closure in June 1991, J Gibbs Ltd had been an essential part of Ripley life for over fifty years. To understand how and why they became established in the village, it may help to learn a little of the parent company and the circumstances in the late 1930s when they sought "a pitch in the country".

John Gibbs founded the company that bears his name in 1841 at Bedfont, Middlesex. The company supplied and made equipment for the market gardeners whose crops of salads and vegetables supplied that local area through Brentford Market, and London via Covent Garden. An early document confirms an order for "6 navigating barrows", detailing the materials minutely. Successive generations of Gibbs designed and built all manner of specialised market garden machinery, and they also became active in agricultural engineering.

The three brothers who came into the business between the wars were Reg, whose interest lay in the motor trade and who established a garage on the Bedfont site, Murray, who also leaned to the motor side, and Sydney, who, even as a schoolboy, would do a stint at the company pitch in Brentford Market from 5-8.30 am, before going off to his studies.

By the late '30s, the development of Heathrow as a commercial airport to rival Croydon and the ever encroaching gravel pits in the area threatened the livelihoods of many customers. Syd Gibbs, a shrewd, far-seeing businessman, realised that survival lay in expansion of his agricultural division farther into the country, and in 1937 he began to look for suitable premises in Surrey. The area of the Wey Valley around Send and Ripley was appealing because they already knew growers there who were customers.

One site that was inspected was that which is now the Colborne Garage. It had been a petrol depot, and it didn't have a good range of buildings. Farther down the Wey, in Godalming, some good premises in the town had to be ruled out because of poor access.

In those days, Arthur Hill was a grower whose land covered what became Georgelands. He sold at Brentford Market and was already a Gibbs customer when he heard of their search. He suggested that the boys' section of the former Ryde House Commercial

School might be worth a look, and late in 1937 the decision was taken to buy it (from Mr Goodman) and establish a new branch in Ripley, opposite the church.

The Gibbs family realised that the man who would set it up and run it would have to have a wide range of skills as well as experience in agriculture. This period was one of great uncertainty, with the threat of war in Europe looming ever larger. It was an investment that involved risk, both on the side of the Gibbs family and the General Manager, who would develop and control the business day to day. The man they found was a 30-year-old engineer and farmer's son, Philip Purser, who became universally known as PMP.

A few lines on his background will indicate what an exceptional man they had appointed. Eldest son of a farmer in Worcestershire, he had attended the famous Grammar School in Chipping Campden. Showing great prowess in all things mechanical and electrical, he left school at 16 to start an apprenticeship with the Marconi Company in London. A trainee radio engineer in 1924 was the equivalent of a computer designer today. Public broadcasting had just been started by the BBC (as 2LO) and it was a period of tremendous technical advances.

But the 1920s were not kind to farmers and it was with infinite regret that the apprenticeship could not be sustained and PMP returned to help run the family farm at Abberton, near Evesham. His father combined mixed farming with a variety of sidelines, even including a quarry in North Wales for a time. However, the business of dealing in working horses was the one that he liked best. This was still the time when the majority of bakers' vans, milk floats and coal carts ran on one-horsepower. In between hoeing mangels, hand-milking the cows, mending the binder, thatching corn-ricks and 101 other jobs that made up farming life at the time, there was a steady stream of horses, bought at sales from South Wales to Lancashire to be routed to their new owners in Worcestershire or Birmingham.

Stories abound. If a horse turned out to be unused to pulling a cart, it would usually show it by kicking the cart to bits when it was being backed into the shafts as a demonstration. Unwilling to turn these equine free spirits into instant dog meat (and take a considerable financial drop), they were turned out to kick each other until the Territorial Army came on summer camp. They were then rented out for pulling gun carriages, as the officer's charger and so on. After a day or two of rebuilding gun limbers and brushing mud off the Colonel's uniform, the amateur soldiers would shoot them in exasperation. Pausing only to let the knacker-man know where his next collection lay, PMP's father would promptly present the Army with a bill for compensation, valuable cash in the hungry '20s.

PMP was, in fact, no great horse-lover. He said recently that he had been sat on one by his father when he was 18 months old. When he was lifted down the horse trod on his foot. Consequently, he had stuck to a bicycle for the last 82 years.

The knowledge gained from doing everything on the farm held PMP in good stead. By the early '30s, the economy had picked up sufficiently for him to resume his own career. Farming was beginning to become mechanised and the large scale installation of milking machines was an important part of it. If one's only practical knowledge of the milk supply-chain is picking a bottle off the doorstep every morning, it is hard to imagine the drudgery of hand-milking, hour after hour, twice a day, every day of the year. The idea of one man being able to milk 50 cows by himself, in two hours or so, was like nirvana for the people who spent five or six hours every day leaning up against a cow's flank. At least it was a job in the dry!

With Alfa-Laval, PMP rapidly found his feet, installing automatic milking plant at

farms in every county of England and Wales and some in Scotland. Usually working on his own, he would arrive at a farm, collect the equipment from the local station and set about converting the old cow byres into a milking parlour. Mr Black and Mr Decker had not met at that time, and chopping holes through 9" engineering brick walls with a hammer and chisel was all part of the job. Being a versatile engineer and a skilled stockman, he could deal with the installation as well as with cowmen, who had a very genuine fear that their beloved cows would be injured by the new-fangled invention. In fact, he became the company's "trouble-shooter", spending weeks on farms fine-tuning the system and patiently teaching the staff how to use it. When the milk-yields were satisfactory, it was back into his Austin Seven for another drive from, perhaps, Carlisle to Canterbury and another milking parlour to sort out.

After several years of this roving life, a more settled job appeared. He started at Gibbs on 28 March 1938. So did Ebenezer Mears. The old school building that fronted the Portsmouth Road was in a poor state of repair and, in any case, a good yard out front was needed. If it was a listed building, no one was particularly bothered when the demolition firm with the distinctive name "bought" it for £30 and flattened it in a matter of days. They got a lot of secondhand bricks for their thirty quid!

Behind this large building ran two more, side by side at right angles to the road. The lefthand one, corrugated iron, had been the gymnasium and this was used as the workshop. The righthand one, much of which was incorporated into the existing building, had a pair of garage doors fitted to the front and became the showroom, stores and offices. The playground, to the rear of the building, became a yard.

Being new to the area (apart from having fitted a milking machine at Cranleigh), PMP sorted himself out with "digs" at the Rio Cafe, run by the Allwork family. It could not have been more handy for the office - this was the original Rio, next to the church, in what is now Ripley Transformers. After a few weeks he moved, to Reg Allwork's house, just past the Colborne Garage. With his wedding arranged for July, PMP asked Reg if the cottage next to their builders' yard, near Bridgefoot Farm, could be rented. It had been Reg's father's, "old" Charlie Allwork's. Reg, his brother, "young" Charlie, and Uncle Steve (the S in the original firm of C & S Allwork) agreed, and PMP and his new wife moved in. A few weeks later came the Munich Pact offering "Peace in our time".

Setting up such an enterprise virtually from scratch was a tremendous task, not helped by the uncertainty of the time. The Royal Show was at Windsor that year, but most who attended were concerned if it would be the last one ever. The Gibbs family did not have unlimited funding, of course, and growth was step by step, not leaps and bounds.

Staff, of course, always had been a bit of a problem for the new company. Used to running a tight ship, PMP did a lot of the repair work himself. He was the only person able to weld - gas-welding - as it was not until after the war that heavy duty cable, suitable for arc welding, was laid. With a certificate in book-keeping, he also kept the accounts straight. Pat White, an Irishman, and Ken Eve were in the works. Bill Smith organised the stores with great efficiency, and did some of the accounts. By 1939, the business looked stable enough for PMP to move to a new house, in the Grove Heath North Estate, as it was called. Across the Channel, other moves were in progress. By September, the new business found another reason for slowing progress - the War.

In practice, it did the opposite: Britain, under-prepared for war, had to organise to feed itself, rather than rely on Canadian wheat, Australian mutton and New Zealand butter. Whilst new machines were obtainable, their supply was subject to all sorts of restrictions and allocations. Consequently, orders might take up to 18 months to arrive. Lease-lend

machinery from the USA filled part of the gap, but their supply was administered by War Ag, the Ministry branch set up to squeeze a quart out of a pint pot. This relied heavily on bureaucracy, and was regarded as more of an obstacle to get around than anything else. Consequently, the number of old machines to be kept going with a bit of welding and some binder wire soared.

Transport was limited to a well-worn 3 ton Austin lorry, driven by PMP's wife, Bobbie. Spares and machinery usually arrived at Clandon Station on the Southern Railway where she slung them aboard with a block and tackle. At one time she became so incensed by the laid-back attitude of the staff at the goods yard that she pocketed the keys and said she would collect to suit herself, not them. Other railway customers were delighted with the newly introduced efficiency and there was a rapid change in attitude on the part of the railwaymen.

Late in 1942, visiting potential customers, PMP introduced himself to Mr Potter, Superintendent at Wisley Gardens. They had a Ransomes tractor to be maintained. Potter sympathised with PMP on the difficulty of running such a small firm, and said that he had a bright lad with the makings of a good mechanic working for him. Gerald Hill was taken on as an "improver", followed a week or so later by another teenager with potential, Gilbert Privett. Gerald subsequently became workshop foreman and he, Gilbert and PMP were the backbone to Gibbs in Ripley, collectively serving over 130 years.

PMP and his wife were very active in extra war-work, acting as supplementary ambulance drivers, based in the depot behind Kenneth-the-Chemists. This, fire-watching and, apparently, some very rowdy parties were all part of village life in the war. A great friend made at the time was Hubert Hardy, who had raced a motor-bike at Brooklands. His business partner was Michael May, another Brooklands man, who lived at Ashburton House, Cartbridge, Send. One of their ventures was a small workshop, behind what was the Three Frogs Cafe, next to Fishers' garage. The site is now a part of the housing estate at Send Marsh. They made fasteners for the aircraft industry. Vickers' factory was built in the middle of the Brooklands circuit at Weybridge. A precision engineers was a very handy place to get unobtainable spares made up. Hardy lodged at the Saddlers Arms and rode about on a fearsomely fast and noisy 500cc Norton. Later in the war, PMP had to collect this and the rider from Blackbushe Aerodrome where both the piston and the speedometer had seized at 113 miles an hour during some impromptu testing.

As the war ground to its conclusion, plans could be made to get the business really moving. Although shortages of materials made life difficult for several more years, by 1946 things had begun to hum along. Several more staff had been recruited, Fred Benham and Derek Harris on the sales side and Ted Goldup, Ken Blake and Tom Weatherall were in the workshop. Later came Mike Farthing, John Covey, Malcolm Ward, Mick Chandler and many others, some of whom stayed until the closure. Another trainee was an ex-Lancaster bomb-aimer, Gordon Dennett, who was brought in as assistant manager. However, Gibbs had the opportunity to buy another agricultural engineers, W J Coles at Bracknell, and after a six-month crash course in everything PMP knew, Coles had a new manager, and Gibbs, with three branches, were really going places.

Miss Watson joined the staff in 1947 as typist, book-keeper and much more besides. She is now better known as Mrs Janet Hill.

In 1948, a proper workshop, designed by PMP and built by Hamburger of Send, was constructed in the old playground. Due to the long delay in obtaining bricks, the building was not completed for 18 months to two years. The former gymnasium had finally become too small for the combines that were beginning to appear.

With better facilities, it was possible to offer "Yeoman Service" to a wider range of farming businesses. The David Brown tractor dealership added real boost. PMP rarely took a day off, but he went on a tour of tin mines in Cornwall as an adviser to his friend, Hardy, who was contemplating opening up some of them. Hardy had just taken delivery of another product of the David Brown Group, an Aston Martin. As might be imagined, the trip was brief, but action packed.

Another motoring connection was the Connaught racing cars built by Rodney Clark at his garage in Send. They needed something cheap as a radiator grille: ever willing to help out, PMP dug out some mesh screens that did the trick.

Although the bread and butter business of the firm revolved around the traditional activities of milking, cultivation and harvest, PMP quickly realised that a willingness to become involved in more innovative activities added value to the business.

An early venture, one that PMP was a little sceptical about (rightly so, it turned out), was Ripley Crop Driers, who set up to dry grass and cube it as an alternative to haymaking. The idea was that the oil-fired drier would be set up in a corner of a field and be fed with grass, which could be carried off in bags. No more hay turning and baling with the risk of loss if it rained.

Unfortunately, by the time the machine had been set up, the mowers were already in the next field. It was installed in a barn opposite the Three Frogs, where it was used for some years, catching fire regularly and absorbing quite a lot of money, some of which Gibbs never received after the last spectacular blaze that included the fuel oil tank. To be strictly fair, Gibbs inherited the servicing of the plant, which had been bought by existing customers as a co-operative: PMP's judgement was rarely wrong.

The next idea was one that really worked - irrigation. Rare in Britain, it was used by the growers in the area in times of low rainfall. Hewitts of Godalming wanted an automatic system to boost yields and PMP obliged with a complete scheme, including a new bore-hole. The pump to this well clogged with silt on its test-run, but cleared itself a few seconds later, covering everyone for 50 yards around in mud. The original scheme was amended and extended several times. Such jobs became a PMP speciality, involving a lot of careful planning, much of which was done late at night in a wooden shed which served as his office for many years. Several of them are still in use.

It would be wrong to get the idea that Gibbs had little competition in those days. The Massey Ferguson dealer, Ben Turner, had its branch in Send Marsh and was a formidable rival. However, PMP and Jimmy Turner remained on cordial terms. Fergusons hit upon the idea of hiring out tractors rather than selling them, which dented the David Brown sales figures for a while. The scheme tended to generate a lot of secondhand tractors to be shifted. Chatting to Jimmy one day, PMP asked how many secondhands he had. "A couple," replied Jimmy, adding rather ruefully "A couple of acres, that is." PMP was also an active member of the Agricultural Machinery Traders and Dealers Association, serving on its Committee for several years. As early as the '50s, he was invited to visit Belgium, Germany and the USA by manufacturers of machinery keen to have such a live-wire gleaning ideas for use at home.

As the '50s became the '60s, the original stores and offices began to bulge, and in 1963 the entire block was rebuilt in the form it now is. It was opened on the Silver Jubilee, 28 March 1963, but very sadly the original sponsor of Gibbs in Ripley, Sydney Gibbs, did not live to see his final contribution completed. One part that was not touched was the top-loft. PMP worked on the basis that the bit you needed was always the one you had thrown away the previous day, so this attic contained all manner of obsolete spares which got many

a farmer out of trouble.

Some other obsolete parts, rather larger, were the pair of swill boilers, bought from a Manchester Corporation abattoir and installed at Homewood Farm in Newark Lane. When fully commissioned, they provided meals on wheels for many hundred pigs on three farms - and much cause for protest from residents when the wind was in the wrong quarter.

PMP retired from day to day management of the branch in 1973, 35 years to the day after he had started it. He continued to help out for several more years and now lives in active retirement in Lincolnshire, still capable of mending anything mechanical or electrical that comes his way. He and Bobbie will have been married for 54 years this summer.

Gibbs, of course, continued after PMP's retirement under Dick Holgate, and the workshops were entirely rebuilt. The agricultural engineering business has changed dramatically in the years since Britain has been a full member of the EEC, reflecting the changes in farming itself. Sad, then, that Gibbs in Ripley became a victim of change in 1991, after such an active role in Surrey's agricultural history, and Ripley village life.

The above notes were contributed by John Purser, the son of PMP. Photograph of Gibbs, Ripley, reproduced by kind permission of Donald Gibbs - Editor.

SURREY RECORD OFFICE CLOSURE

The Surrey Record Office is closed between 3 August and 31 October 1992 inclusive. Although the Search Room services are closed due to building works, some other services will be available, such as the facility for deposition of documents and also for the cleaning or eradication of insects from documents.

For any further information, please ring 081-541-9065.

MISCELLANY

The Society has builders' sand and ballast surplus to requirements. Would any member wanting it contact Derek Bromley on Guildford 222150. The Society also need topsoil for the new Local History Centre site; please contact Les Bowerman. Transport can probably be arranged.

Bill Titcombe has moved to Woodhill Farm Cottage, Send, Woking, Surrey GU23 7JP (0483-211891). Anyone wishing to contact Bill, from whom I am sure he will be keen to hear, can write care of Mr & Mrs Rowland, or telephone the above number.

Newsletter Contributions The closing date for material for the next Newsletter is Friday, 18 September. Please ensure that all copy is delivered to the Editor by this date.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Brighton Pavilion and Brighton Museum - Sunday, 6 September, meeting at Send Marsh Green at 12.30 pm, or at the Royal Pavilion at 1.45 pm. A guided tour of the Pavilion has been arranged for the Society, starting at 2 pm. It will last approximately one hour, including an introductory talk of some 15-20 minutes. This famous landmark was originally created by Henry Holland at the request of George, Prince of Wales, as a "classically styled villa", at the end of the 18th century. John Nash subsequently enlarged the villa and transformed it into its present dramatic structure, inspired by Indian architecture. The entrance fee is £3.30 (or £2.50 for OAPs, students and children), and there is a supplementary charge of 60p for the guided tour. Time permitting, a visit to the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (admission free), just around the corner from the Pavilion, is recommended. It has a particularly fine display of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, and a Fashion Gallery.

Coffee Morning and Bring-and-Buy (small items) - Sunday, 13 September, 10.30 am to 12 noon. This event is being held by kind permission of Iris and Bernard Watts at their home, Iron Latch, Send Marsh Road. Proceeds of bring-and-buy are to go towards the History Society's Local History Centre.

Meeting, Red Cross Hall, Send - Tuesday, 22 September, at 8 pm. A talk with slides by Mr F Haveron, on "The Industrial Archaeology of Surrey", a county rich in fascinating examples, which his Society is preserving wherever possible. These include mills, a semaphore tower, pigeon house, machinery, etc, and the Maltings and the Dennis factory.

Meeting, Ripley Village Hall - Wednesday, 21 October, at 8 pm. Mr Ron Shettle will speak on "The Burning Question, the History of Fire Protection in Surrey". The talk will be illustrated with slides, and according to Mrs Shettle, her husband is passionately devoted to the preservation of fire engines and fire stations.

Silent Auction and Wine and Cheese Evening - Friday, 30 October, Ripley Village Hall, 7-10 pm. Tickets, £3 each, will be available from John and Bette Slatford, Audrey Sykes and any other Committee member prior to the evening, and also at the evening meetings in September and October.

Meeting, Red Cross Hall, Send - Tuesday, 17 November, at 8 pm. An illustrated talk by Mr A White, 1st Dean's Verger, on Guildford Cathedral. Mr White has been connected with the Cathedral since 1961.

Christmas Social - Friday, 11 December, Ripley Village Hall. The time to be advised, but this year the Christmas Social will follow the traditional format, consisting of food and wine, coffee/tea, etc, followed by an audio-visual show given by an old friend of the Society, Ron Croucher. Ron is a superb professional natural history photographer, and is well known in Surrey for, among other things, his passion for badger protection. The audio-visual show will concentrate on natural history in general, but no doubt a few badgers will creep in. If you have not seen an audio-visual show before, you're in for a fascinating evening.

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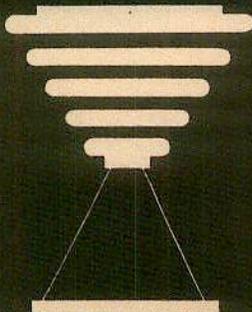
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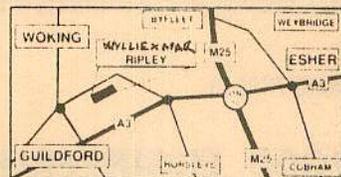
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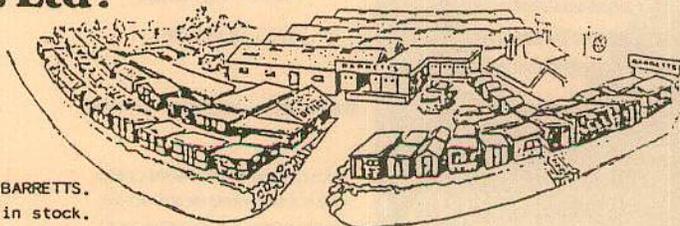
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