

Edwardian life at Frensham Hill – by Roy Waight with research by Neil Pittaway

Thanks to Russ, who mentioned my book on More House School to her, the acting head-mistress of Frensham Heights invited me to the school on 13 June to discuss the possibility of writing a book about the school. In 1925 it will celebrate its centenary. Laura Griffiths, the acting head-mistress, and I sat in the extraordinarily imposing drawing room close to the entrance of the building discussing the history of the school. Then she astonished me with one of those delightful surprises that make the lonely life of the local historian liveable.



She told me that someone had, the previous week, approached the reception desk with a large photograph album. He said that he had discovered it thrown away in a skip and wondered if the school might want it. He had then left. I don't know who he was. When Laura eventually found time to open it, it was to be transported into a magical past world of Edwardian grace, cricket, fashion and fun. The album contains hundreds of photographs dating from between 1907 and 1909 taken mostly, but not exclusively, at Frensham Hill, which had been completed just half a dozen years before.

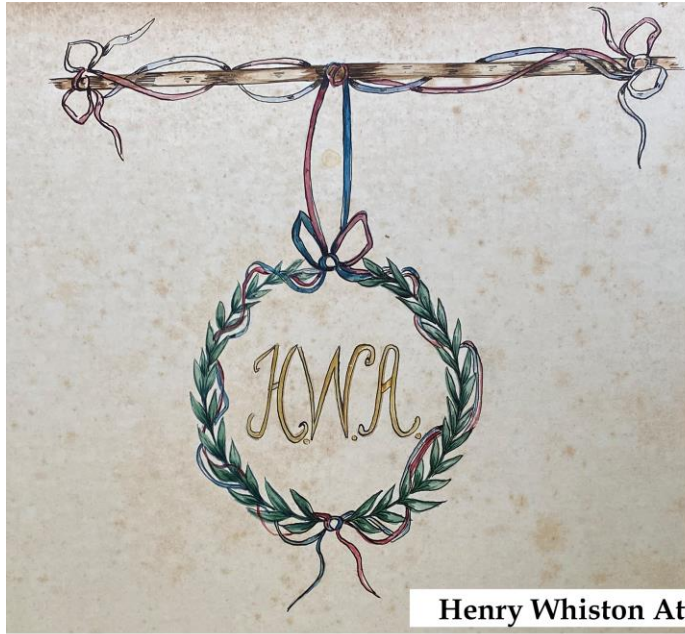
The first page consists of the initials HWA in attractive lettering, enclosed in a beautifully painted garland of leaves. The style is positively William Morris. The whole of the album is inter-woven with twisting ribbons in a similar style. Interspersed here and there are little cameos that look very much like the work of Beatrix Potter (see this page). The album was put together and garlanded by a talented artist.

I immediately did what I usually do when confronted with a puzzle, I went to see Neil Pittaway and lent him the album. Neil soon deduced, and he is certainly correct, that the initials HWA stand for Henry Whiston Atchison. He was born on 30 April 1881 and died on 10 February 1962. He came from a 'posh' background. His father was Colonel Charles Henry Atchison who is mentioned in Burke's Peerage.

Henry Whiston Atchison was in the Royal Field Artillery (the RFA). He lived with his sister, Evelyn, and his mother in Fareham from at least 1921. The album contains many photographs taken on the Isle of Wight. His division of the RFA was based in Ryde where he was living, single, in 1911. He was a keen cricketer and he must have been good since he played for the Free Foresters before the war. For many years the Free Foresters' matches against Oxford University and Cambridge University had first-class

status, the last such game being that against Oxford at The Parks in June 1968. The Foresters' side in that match, which they won by 299 runs, included Mike Brearley.





Henry Whiston Atchison



Horse riding at Frensham Hill Falconry?

The guests and staff - the School treat 7 July 1907





Relaxing apres cricket



The great Ranjitsinhji



Fun at Frensham Hill



Picking posies at Frensham Hill



Charles Charrington bids his guests goodbye



The Hampshire Hogs – note Conan-Doyle, front row, left, and insert.

It seems HWA had a child, Myrtle, in 1931 and the 1939 register says he was married. Some say that Myrtle's mother was Marjorie Woodruff Syer and indeed Myrtle's birth record in 1931 has her mother's maiden name as Syer. Neil has so far found no marriage record and it is likely Marjorie Woodruff Atchison or Syer died in the USA. Myrtle herself died last year and the death was registered in Liss. Was this where the album was dumped?

Neil suspects that the album (perhaps the first of several?) was made up and illustrated by either Henry's sister, Evelyn, or his mother, Mary, possibly during WW1 while Henry was off fighting. Henry was awarded the DSO for his actions in Mesopotamia in the latter stages of WW1. I suspect that the link between Henry Atchison and C E N Charrington, the man who built Frensham Hill, originated in their mutual love of cricket. Presumably they became friends after the Free Foresters played at Charrington's cricket ground. The ground was reputedly of first-class standard.

Many of the photographs in the album show cricket teams who played at Frensham Hill. Charrington was a keen cricketer. When he had Frensham Hill built he made sure he had provision for the great game. Many of the teams that visited were good, such as the Old Carthusians, the Hampshire Hogs and the Free Foresters themselves.

I remember Robin Crawford telling me that Dr. W G Grace no less had played at Frensham Hill and although there is no photograph of the illustrious doctor in the album, there is a photograph of Ranjitsinhji, one of the great cricketers of history. And, looking out from one of the photographs is none other than Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle. Conan-Doyle was a fine cricketer who once bowled out W G Grace when playing for the MCC ('my proudest moment' according to Conan-Doyle).

There is also a fine photograph of Bernard Bosanquet who has earned a place among the immortals of cricket as the man who invented the googly. You can see him showing the Frensham Hill-ites how to perform this magic delivery. For those unacquainted with the arcana of cricket, a googly is bowled by a leg-spin bowler. The typical leg-break delivery spins the ball away from the batsman's stumps after it has pitched. The beauty of the googly is that it is actually an off-spinner, where the ball pitches back into the right-handed batsman rather than away from him. The unsuspected batsman is tricked.

Bosanquet deployed his googly for the first time at Lord's in 1900. Leicestershire's Samuel Coe was stumped off a delivery that bounced four times. Presumably the batsman was so bewildered he didn't remember to return to the crease. England won the 1904/5 test series against Australia largely as a result of Bosanquet. He took 6 for 51 at Sydney in 1904 and at Trent Bridge in 1905 his 8 for 107 enabled another emphatic win. Bosanquet was also an Oxford half-blue for hammer-throwing and billiards, was the first player to score two centuries and take ten wickets in a match, and fathered the colourful 1970s newsreader, Reginald 'Reggie' Bosanquet. When he appeared at Frensham Hill, Bosanquet would have been one of the heroes of the moment.

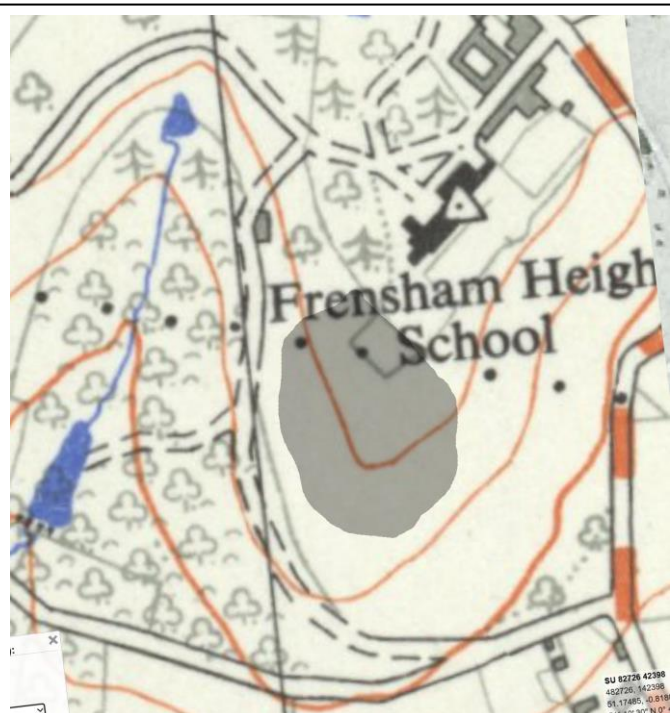
One might wonder where the cricket pitch was located at Frensham Hill. It was situated on a slight slope to the west of the school as shown by the grey shading in the attached map.

Other photographs reveal, with a faded poignancy, all sorts of things. First the sheer majesty of the building as it was in 1907, the superb gardens, the wonderful cricket pavilion, and the various lawns and coigns which begin to make plausible the reports that Frensham Hill cost Charrington £250,000 to build.

Then there are the hosts of elegant ladies all dressed in long dresses and elegant hats and the men, mostly



Picnic on the lawn – the fine lady and, in the background, the deferential servant



The location of Charrington's cricket pitch



Bernard Bosanquet



and the googly



**Punch and Judy
at school treat**



**Cricket - C E N Charrington
second from right (bottom row)**



Decorous tug-of-war

looking as if they'd walked off a set from a P G Wodehouse film. There is plenty of chiffon and a surfeit of tailored blazers. Then there is Charrington's magnificent motor car, the numerous liveried servants, the horse riding and numerous party games (there is a lovely photograph of the ladies engaging in a decorous tug of war). There is 'a farm' complete with duck pond. Picnics, tea on the lawn, relaxing on a swing like a painting by Fragonard ... even someone apparently with a falcon.

Of particular interest are the photographs of the annual parties given for the local children, mostly from Rowledge. I knew these took place. C E N Charrington was a philanthropic type. His name was chosen for one of the houses at Rowledge School. The photographic evidence suggests these treats for children were rather grand, more like the Rowledge Fayre, with roundabouts, car rides plus the obligatory Punch and Judy show. Dozens of children attended. The album also offers the only images I have seen of the grown up Charrington (there is a delightful photograph of him as a child in the National Portrait Gallery).

There is also what must surely be a photograph of the Revd. Parker, the first vicar of Rowledge. One of the photographs shows a gentleman in clerical garb, tall with a slightly stooped appearance, watching the Punch and Judy show. Neil pointed out his similarity to the portrait we have of Parker. The bushy beard (now grey), the sticking-out ears and the dolichocephalic head. This is, surely, the only photograph we have of the first vicar 'in action' so to speak.

But what comes across most markedly is the impression of Edwardian grace and carefree living. Someone described the Edwardian era

as a "leisurely time when women wore picture hats and did not vote, when the rich were not ashamed to live conspicuously, and the sun really never set on the British flag". The Edwardian period was the romantic golden age of long summer afternoons and garden parties. For the wealthy, it was also a period of blissful indolence between the great achievements of the preceding Victorian age and the catastrophe of the following war.

The age was, perhaps, the last one where the vast difference between the wealthy and the poor was manifest by the former without embarrassment. In this fantastic photograph album we see wealthy and privileged people living out the comic opera of pre-war existence. They could not have known that, only a few years later, world war would come and bring another kind of music. The contrast between this archive of photographs and those taken during the time of the Frensham Hill Military Hospital couldn't be greater.



The Revd. Parker watches Punch and Judy

I thought people might like to see a selection of the images taken from the album, and my thanks to Neil for quickly providing much of the detail.