



Elham
Historical
Society

February 2024

Volume 14 Issue 1

Chairman's Message

Once again the EHS February Newsletter is coming to you in March. No blame for that can be attached to our dedicated editor Dilys, who does all she can to get our contributions in in good time. My excuse is age and age's evils. The morning has always been my best time for working, but taking a daily diuretic doesn't aid my concentration then, and by the afternoon I am apt to doze off. I'm often awake and full of ideas at 2 in the morning, but the thought of sitting up in bed working on the laptop doesn't appeal. And everything takes longer.

But enough of self pity. This week we look forward to 'Steam in Elham', a talk by Richard Moffatt, son of the legendary Fred Pegden, and well known to many of you.

In April we will have the Annual General Meeting, when we can further discuss the future of the EHS, and hopefully recruit some new blood to help ensure that the future is positive.

Meanwhile we are planning 'The Changing Face of Elham', Part 3, which will look at the once vibrant trading heart of the village in the High Street.

D.M.B.

Forthcoming Events

Unless otherwise stated all events are at 7.00 pm for a 7.30pm start in Elham Village Hall

Friday 15th March - **Steam In Elham with Richard Moffat**

Friday 12th April - **AGM**

Date to be advised - **The Changing Face of Elham' Part 3**

Admission costs: EHS Members £3 Non Members £5

(There is also a Non EHS Member charge for external visits)

Space at Elham Village Hall may be restricted so please arrive early

NOTIFICATION of the 14th EHS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

12th April 2024 7:00pm for a 7:30 start

During the evening you will hear the Chairman's Report, the Treasurer's Report, details of projects worked on over the past year and advance notice of forthcoming events.

We will need to receive any nominations for the EHS Committee 14 days before the AGM – 29th March. Nominations will be for the following positions:

Chairman - Vice Chairman - Treasurer & Secretary

If you have a nomination please forward it to the EHS Secretary at elhamhistorical@outlook.com

Nominations and Voting for the Committee will be by active Members only. You can renew your membership on the night or before. Fees can be paid by Standing Order or bank transfer (Sort code: 523023. Account No: 34762434 Reference: surname – initials -) or by cash or cheque made payable to EHS, delivered to Membership Secretary at Cherry Cottage, New Road, Elham, Canterbury, Kent. CT4 6TQ. Membership is for 12 months starting 1st April. £10 Single and £20 Family.

'A GANG OF FOUR' (plus) - A Tribute and An Appeal

The Elham Historical Society was set up in 2010 and for a brief while the original members were known as 'The Gang of Four'. They were the late and much missed Andree Sladden, Bryan Badham, Derek Boughton and Dilys Webb (in alphabetical order by first name). They were joined straight away by Barry Webb.

Over the years others have done their bit but tribute must be paid to the original 'players' without whom Elham would not have had such an enterprising and active historical society.

My wife Roma and I are comparative newcomers to the village although we have walked in and around the Elham Valley for many years. I mention this as the first thing which made me aware of how lucky Elham is to have such a Society was the First World War commemoration in 2014. I intended to do a country walk from Elham but was so impressed by the information about the village's connection to that horrible war that I spent the entire day walking around the village looking at the information panels etc. To think that such a small village with so few active members of the Society could put on such a display! How lucky we are.

Then the evening tribute to 100 years of BBC radio broadcasting was an event not to be missed. These two events plus many many others and research etc over the years show clearly what an asset the Society is.

A quick glance at the Society's website shows how much work and dedication has been put into running the Society. For the online 'newspaper' to be dated '1066' and to appear on faded paper was inspired (and inspirational).

I could go on but I think a big 'thank you' will do for now.

The problem is that time has marched on and the existing 'work horses' (I'm sure they won't mind this description) quite rightly feel that changes must be made and more people volunteer to take on some of the workload.

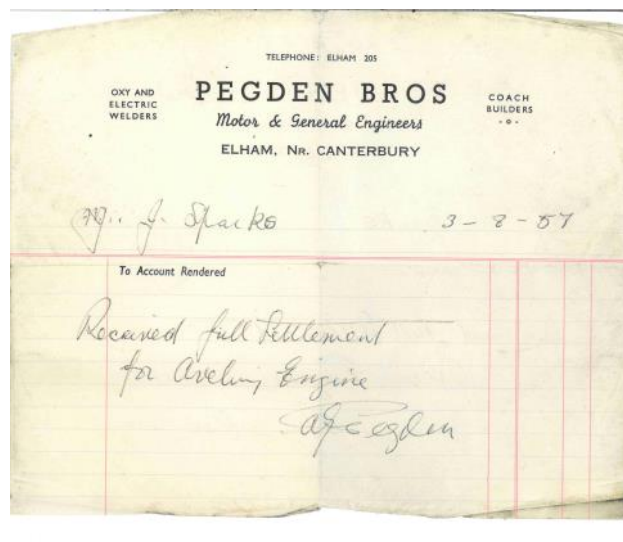
A possible suggestion would involve scaling back on the Society's activities to concentrate merely on Elham, holding far fewer talks and maybe becoming something akin to a study group. It would be a great loss/shame if any such scaling down were to take place, but this is on the cards unless more members step up to take on some of the existing workload. This was discussed at a meeting towards the end of last year, and will be on the agenda for the AGM on Friday 12th April (Village Hall, 7.00pm for 7.30, bar open). An appeal will be made for more volunteers and if this does not work then almost certainly drastic changes will have to be considered.

It is not an exaggeration to say that given the achievements, website and database of the Society we are unique and the envy of many other historical societies. Shall we keep it that way? It is up to us all.

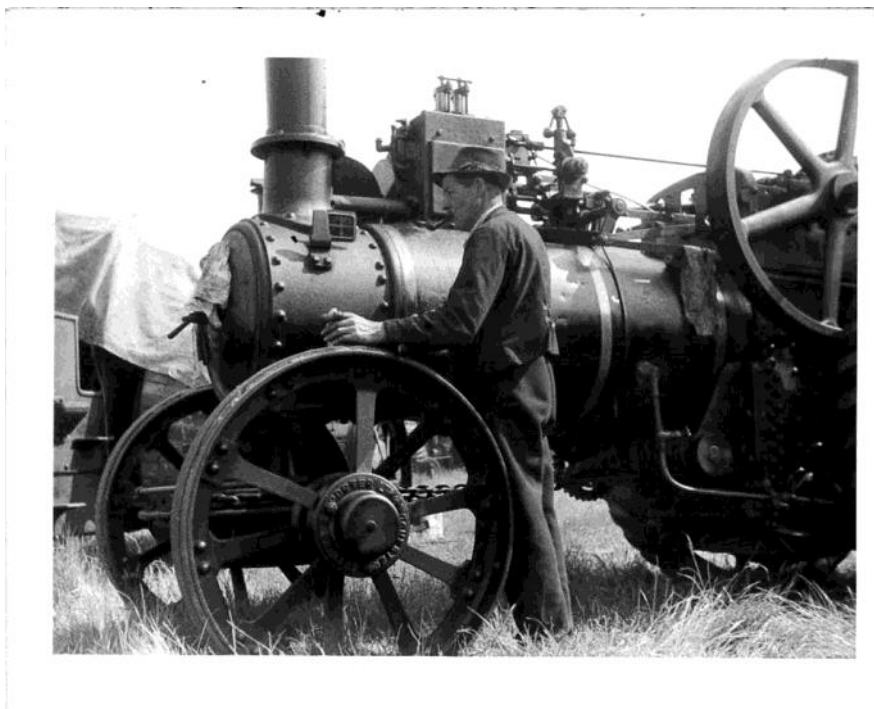
Pegden Brothers Traction Engine Sale in 1957

During the Christmas 2023 break the EHS received an email from Mr. Ben Headon, who lives in West Sussex, enquiring about his Aveling traction engine No. 8653, which had been sold by Pegden Brothers engineers at Elham.

They sold the engine to a Mr John Sparks in 1957, the receipt for which is shown below.



Here is the receipt from when John Sparks purchased the engine. Janet his daughter says that the bottom of the receipt was cut off to prevent her mother from knowing what he'd spent on the engine.



John Sparks with the engine in the mid-sixties, he used the engine commercially winching timber and running a rack saw, until 1981 when she then required boiler work. The engine was based in Smallfield near Horley in Surrey.

Pegden Brothers Traction Engine Sale in 1957 Cont/



The fully restored engine shown here in 2019 running a threshing machine at a local show near Chichester, West Sussex.

You will be able to hear more about this engine and the work of the Pegden Brothers in Richard Moffatt's Steam in Elham talk on the 15th March 2024.

Please see our Future Events section of this newsletter or the EHS website for further details.

Photos from the Archives



Snow in Running Hill Lane, Elham—13th March 2013



John Foreman

John Foreman died peacefully on Saturday, 2nd March, at Yew Tree House, which had been home to him and Margaret for sixty years. John was brought up in Wingham, but his grandparents and many ancestors had lived in Elham.

John was a very skilled precision engineer and plied his modern trade at premises previously occupied by wheelwrights and coopers. John was joined in his business, and his love of old motors, by his son Robert.

John had not been seen about recently, but for many years of his retirement he loved to walk up to the shop (wearing his trademark sandals summer and winter) to collect his daily paper, and then sit outside for a chat.

He leaves one very visible example of his skill for all to see, and indeed many of us look at it every day. In 2010 he and Robert repaired and updated the weathervane from the spire of St Mary's church and can be seen with it as the steeplejacks prepare to haul it back into place.

D.B.



A PERSONAL 'HISTORY' OF ELHAM

Although my wife Roma and I didn't move to the village until June 2021 we have walked in and around the Elham Valley for many years (me early 1970's, Roma 1985). Many of these walks either started from or ended in Elham, or Elham featured in the walk.

We are both equally unobservant and as we hate shopping, shops and their closures register little with us. We know that over the years most of the village shops have gone but as we didn't live here, their passing had little impact on us. The one exception was the Fudge Shop. For a while we were friendly with a German family from the former East Berlin - Dad, Mum and two teenage boys. When the boys were younger a family walk (they were keen walkers) would always begin with a sweet they called a 'start bon-bon'. Roma and I made this one of our traditions, and for walks starting in Elham we would get our start bon-bons (and 11s and lunch and end of walk ones) from the Fudge Shop.

Another place we frequently patronised on our walks was the Abbots Fireside (a coffee for the start of a walk, a proper drink for the end). It seemed more like a hotel then.

Back in the day my challenge walk was from Canterbury to home in Folkestone following the Elham Valley Way to Elham and then my own route to home via Shuttlesfield and Paddlesworth. The Elham Valley Way is waymarked to bring walkers into the village but I ignored this (and kept straight on) as I know I would have found the temptation of four (then three) pubs too great to resist. And if there's anything better than one pint it's two (and if there's etc etc!).

The Elham Valley Way is a brilliant, well waymarked walk (from Canterbury to Hythe) devised by a Folkestone chap called John Criddle and subsequently adopted by the County Council. It passes through Bishopsbourne Churchyard where there is a surprisingly non-religious bench plaque which reads -

*'It was no accident me finding you someone had a hand in it long before we ever knew
Calamity and Wild Bill'*

I guess you have to be of a certain age, or a film buff, to appreciate this.

I know we used to get more winter snow than we do nowadays but I don't recall too much snow getting in the way of my walks. There is, however, one memorable (for me) occasion between Christmas and the New Year. I'd set off from Elham, (a bit of overnight snow under foot), up alongside Collards Wood and through Tye Wood. Whilst walking through the latter the snow heavens opened and by the time I got to the wood's end visibility was down to about 50 yards. I decided not to continue but to go down Mill Hill and back along the main road to Elham. The drive home was a bit nasty as the snow was falling, and settling, quite rapidly.

I often left Elham on a walk up the footpath beside Derek Boughton's Ann's Cottage in The Row then across the open field to join the path to Exted. For a while I was friendly with the land owner and I remember asking him why he didn't fence in the path so it had to follow the 'correct' route to Cullens Hill. He indicated that the villagers might make his life more pleasant if he left things as they were! I often used the 'correct' path to Cullens Hill before Cadiz was built. I walked it once thereafter. The path was and is completely unobstructed through Cadiz, but it seemed such an invasion of privacy walking up the back garden and along the front drive I couldn't do it again. Anyway, the walk along The Row (in my opinion the most attractive road in the village) and up Cullens Hill is delightful.

Apart from walking, I used to be a frequent visitor to the village. For some years I was friendly with an insurance broker in Lyminge and we had, over some years, many pleasant lunches in Elham. In summer we would sit in the delightful and colourful gardens of the then Kings Arms. In winter we could usually be found in the New Inn - a pleasant and warm pub, sadly neglected by the brewers.

The countryside around Elham doesn't seem to have changed much over the years. The change I notice most is that over the last few years there has been far less grazing by cattle and sheep. In consequence (and as Ann Laker recently pointed out in the village newsletter) there is far more scrub on a lot of fields, and this is particularly sad as once something like hawthorn takes hold it is the devil's own job to get rid of.

One walk I started from Elham with a friend. We had an 11's stop when we had a coffee (from a flask) and a Mars bar. He bought his from a cheapo shop in Dover, something like £2 for four. I forgot mine and had to buy one in our shop - almost £1 for one. At 11's he wouldn't let me forget the price difference. I got my own back by eating mine very, very slowly and making lots of 'mmm' noises whilst he had to wait.

As a P.S. may I say that since we arrived here we find everyone so friendly and helpful. Indeed the village should adopt the slogan 'Elham-The Friendly Village'.

Keith Mortimer

Tales from the database and newspapers

Ames of Elham

Harold Ames, Senior

Harold Ames Senior (b 1852 — d 1936) made the move from Smeeth to Elham around 1878. Originally from Sellindge, he was born to Elgar and Emma, among at least eleven siblings. Initially employed as a bricklayer, he later followed his father as a builder. Around the turn of the century, he and his wife Isabella relocated to Elham, where they established their permanent residence at the Knoll. Prior to this, they had lived at 2 Flint Cottages and Vale View. Throughout his life, Harold actively served as a parish councillor across multiple parishes. He was appointed treasurer of the Elham Charity School in 1900.



In 1904 Harold was re-appointed Inspector of Nuisances for one year at a salary of £70.

Here on the right is a letter from Harold in 1921 showing that nothing really changes.

In 1929 his grandson Les served as the best man at his marriage to Kate Maycock in Folkestone. The wedding was intended to be a quiet affair but they were greeted by a crowd of people who showered them with confetti. Harold had served as a member of the Elham Board of Guardians for a number of years. Les left for a tour of the West

Indies at the weekend with the MCC.

He stood as a local cricket umpire although past his four score years and his decisions were well respected.

Records show that he was the owner of Church Cottage in 1934 and left the not inconsiderable sum of £9206 16s 5d (equivalent to £540,000 in today's money) on his death in 1936.

A WASTE OF PUBLIC MONEY.

To the Editor of the Kentish Express.

Sir,—I beg through the medium of your widely read paper to call attention to the manner in which the ratepayers' money is being squandered by the Kent County Council. During the war the road through the Elham Valley became much worn and the roads were pleased when a sum of money was voted for its repair. After many months a start was made and for weeks truck loads of material were being deposited by the road side or at depots but, alas, it was obvious to the most casual observer that the material was very inferior, having about one third of yellow clay mixed with the stone. The material after a time was forked over and a lot of clay culled out, which is now lying inches deep at the depots. The remainder was mixed with other material and rolled in and when finished there was for weeks a small river of mud along the sides of the road. After being allowed to consolidate the mud was taken away by cart loads. Now, after every shower this so-called new road is in a worse condition than it was before, being covered with a thick yellow mud and the surface already full of pot holes, and almost unpassable for people on foot. You may imagine very strong comments are being made. Most people wish to know who is responsible for the buying of this large quantity of inferior material, many yards of which are now having to be daily thrown away. Have the ratepayers no redress for this shocking waste of public money? I expect it will be like most responsibilities—shifted from one department or individual to another, and all escape, which is small satisfaction to the people who suffer the inconvenience and have to pay for it.—Yours faithfully,

HAROLD AMES.

18 January 1921 Kentish Express

AMES Harold of The Knoll Elham Kent died 16 November 1936 at the Bevan Nursing Home Folkestone Probate **London** 13 January to Kate Ames widow Harold Ames retired local government officer and Thomas Luson Kendrick solicitor. Effects £9511 16s. 5d. Resworn £9206 16s. 5d.

"DENCHER" POUT.

To the Editor of the Kentish Express.

Sir,—When the commons or waste land near here were enclosed about fifty years ago nearly all of the rough pasture was made "dencher" of, the coarse turf being taken off about three inches thick. This was done with a "dencher" plough, a man holding and pushing the handle and his wife or boy pulling with a line. Some few ploughs are still to be seen in the labourers' sheds. After the turf has been taken off it is put into large stacks, a fire is lighted in the centre, and the turf or any rubbish is heaped on the fire, which must be kept from breaking through or blazing out. These heaps have several tons in them, as much as twenty sometimes, and have very great heat, being kept alight for several weeks. All the earth that adheres to the turf is burnt fine and dry and is very useful manure, which is called "dencher" ash. Most cottages having a large garden save all rubbish and once a year make what they term a "dencher" fire, the ashes from which they spread on the garden. A "dencher" plough is used by hand and not drawn by horses.—Yours truly,

HAROLD AMES,

The Knoll, 23 December 1916 Kentish Express Elham.

I have received some interesting correspondence relating to place names and Kentish dialect. I was told by someone "who knew" that the natives of Acrise called the village Akers, but Mr. **Harold Ames**, of Elham, informs me that for thirty years he has collected rates and lived fifty years close by the village, but has never heard anyone call the place Akers.

The mention of Elham reminds me of an occurrence when I heard two strangers to Kent say that they had visited El-lam and Ly-minge, each one exactly reverse to the local pronunciation. The emphasis on the wrong syllable was illustrated in an amusing way by old Ashfordians talking of the "dis-meter" and the "circum-ferrence."

15 July 1932 Kentish Express

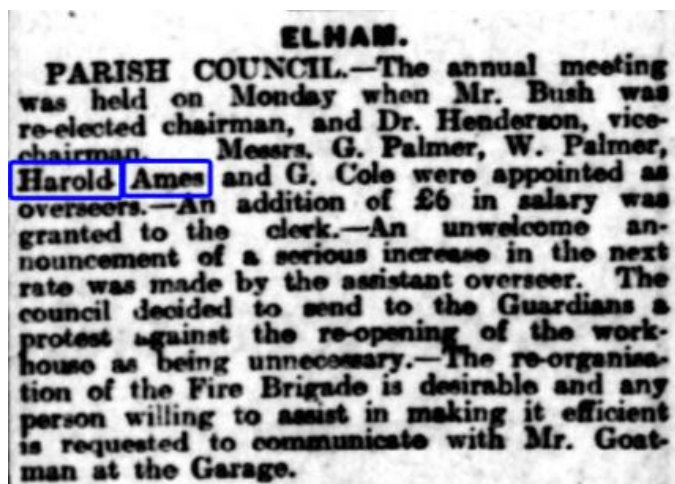
From Mr. **Harold Ames**, of Elham, I have obtained some highly interesting information. He remembers his mother sending him to gather gorse blooms which she stewed and then made his sister, who was a child at the time, drink it frequently to ease a croupy cough. He believes that a little treacle was added. This, no doubt, to make it more palatable to the child.

6 July 1934 Kentish Express

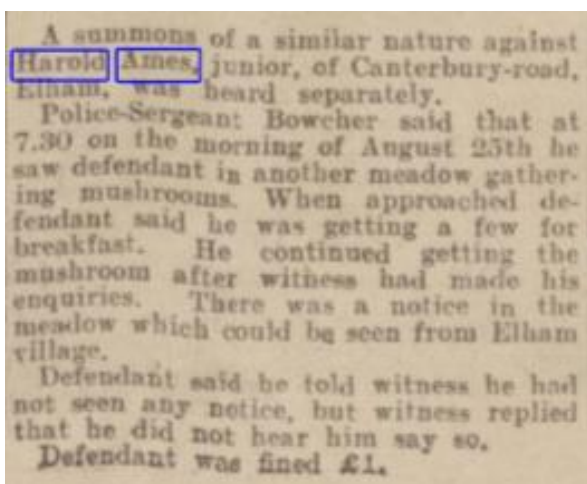
Tales from the database and newspapers cont/...

Harold Ames, Junior

Harold Ames Junior (b 1875—d 1959) was born in Sellindge but moved to Elham with his family at a young age and attended the esteemed Elham Charity School. Initially, he trained as a draper's apprentice in Bapchild. However, by 1901, he had returned to Elham and begun working as a rate and tax collector. Shortly after, he married local girl Edith Broadbridge and they settled in Chichester Place. Their son Leslie was born in 1905. In addition to his commitments in the realm of finance, Harold found fulfillment in serving his community, notably as the Honorary Secretary for the local gardening society. His dedication to civic duties was further exemplified through his roles as an assistant overseer, culminating in his appointment as an overseer in 1920.



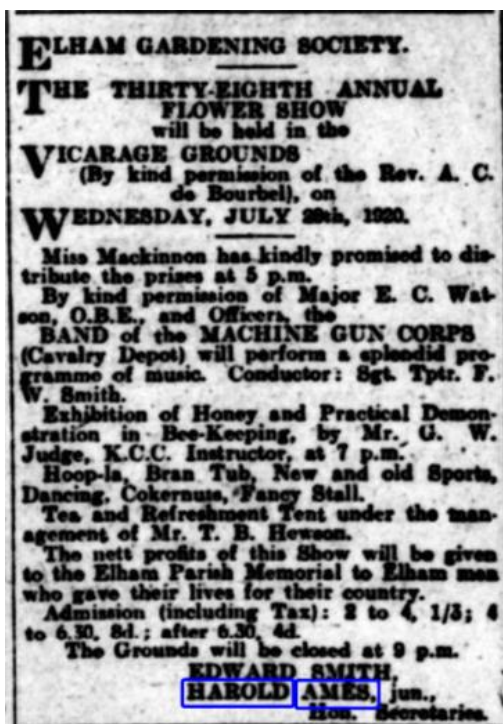
24 April 1920 Kentish Express



28 September 1929 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald

A brush with the law in 1929 resulted in a fine of 20s. for the unlawful picking of cultivated mushrooms. Despite his protestations regarding the oversight of notices, his plea was unfortunately not upheld.

Harold lived in Ramsgate for the ten years before his death at his son's home in Canterbury. Harold was a fine left-arm bowler himself and played for Elham and other clubs in the district until he was 50. He also had not missed a Canterbury cricket week for 50 years and was intensely proud of his son's achievements.

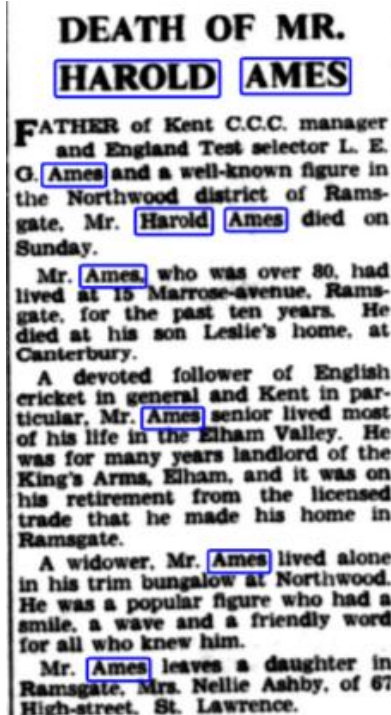


24 July 1920 Kentish Express

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15 July 1932 Kentish Express



18 February 1959 East Kent Times

Tales from the database and newspapers cont/...

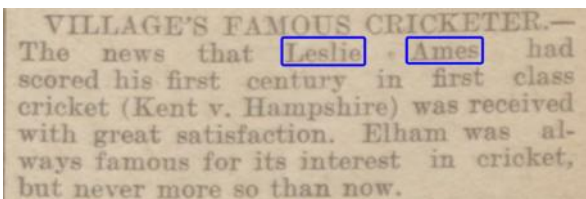
Les Ames

Les or Leslie Ethelbert George Ames CBE (b 1905—d 1990) to give him his full name excelled at cricket and football. At school Les topped the averages at Harvey Grammar for two or three seasons and played for Elham boys, Smeeth where he once scored 185 and finally Elham Cricket Club. By 1924 he was playing for the county second XI and made his first-class debut in 1926. He started playing football with the Elham Juniors competing in the Folkestone and District League, and then played for two seasons with Brabourne, during which time that club secured the Ashford and District championship

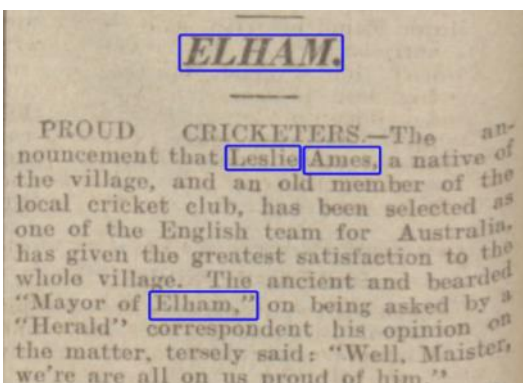
Later he became identified with Folkestone and was there for a season and a half before transferring to Clapton Orient (now Leyton Orient). At the end of his footballing career he joined Gillingham where he played five matches and scored one goal. He played mostly as a centre forward but often appeared on the left wing probably to avoid injury.

At the time he was playing cricket, he was without a doubt the greatest wicketkeeper-batsman the game had so far produced. Ames was England's first-choice wicketkeeper from 1931 to 1939 - when he virtually gave up the job. For Kent - he was an integral part of their Championship side from 1927 to the first match of 1951. He passed 1000 runs in a season seventeen times - going on to 3000 once and 2000 on five occasions. Unusually for a wicket-keeper - he also bowled—taking 24 first-class wickets. Ames was a Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 1929.

A social and dance in the spacious ex-Service Men's Hall in Elham was held in honour of Les before his departure with the "All England" cricketing team for an Australian tour in 1929. They were entertained by the Elham Jazz Band.



11 June 1927 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald



4 August 1928 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald

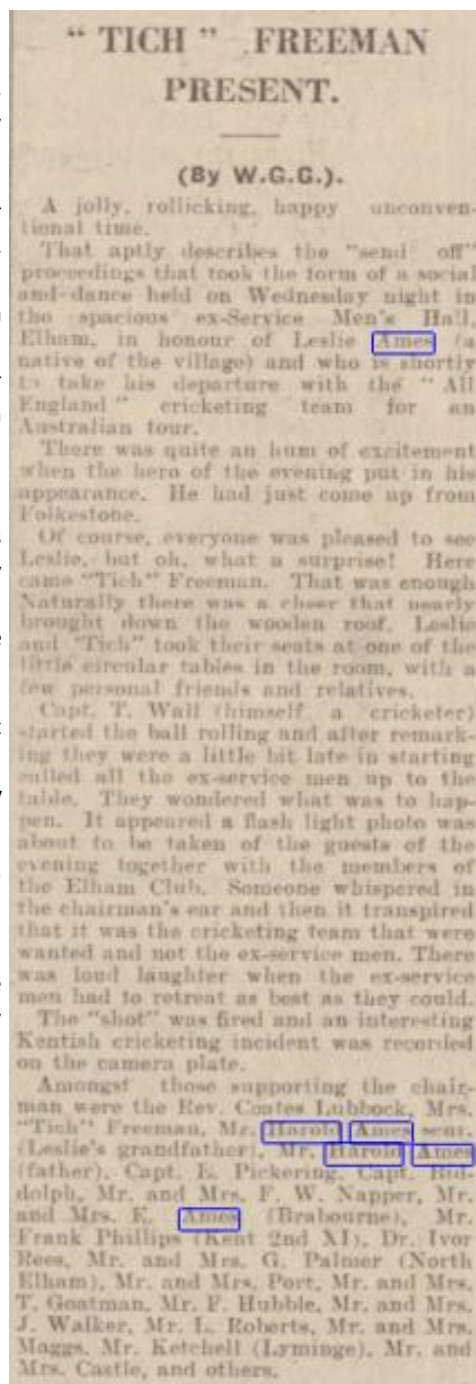
Les married Leonie File, youngest daughter of Leo File of the King's Arms at the St. Mary Church in Elham on Wednesday, April 30th 1930. Miss File had lived in California for the past nine years. The bride and bridegroom had known each other all their lives, and have grown up together in Elham.

The Rev. Allard de Bourbel officiated. Practically all of the Kent professionals were present, and they formed an archway of bats as the bridal party left the church. Mr. C. Wright, Kent's fast bowler, was the best man.



What may not be so well-known is that Les was also a fine darts player often found in the King's Arms on a Thursday evening.

After his retirement from cricket RAF Squadron Leader Les was an England selector, secretary/manager of Kent and served on the committee at the MCC. He died suddenly at his home in Canterbury on February 26, 1990, aged 84,



8 September 1928 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald

Tales from the database and newspapers cont/...

Frank Ames

Franklin Ames who resides at the Sycamores is a second cousin once removed of Les and worked for him for over fifty years. He can often be seen walking to the village shop on a Wednesday to get his Racing Post. He was no mean cricketer himself playing for Kent second XI and recording a 51 for the club & ground team in 1964.

Miscellaneous

ELHAM TO HONOUR FAMOUS SON

TOMORROW famous cricketing personalities will gather in Elham to honour Leslie Ames, a son of the village, and one of the greatest Kent and England players, who is the first professional to be made a Test selector.

Brigadier H. R. Mackeson, president of Kent County Cricket Club, will hand Leslie Ames a silver fruit dish inscribed with the White Horse of Kent. It is a gift from the whole of Elham and from cricketers over a wide area. The event is sponsored by Elham Cricket Club, Football Club and Parish Council. Among those expected to attend are Mr. N. Christopherson, the Kent secretary, Mr. B. H. Valentine, chairman of the Kent Association of Cricket Clubs, and the M.C.C. coach, Mr. G. Fenner.

Famous Test umpire, Mr. Frank Chester, who has seen Ames in action before and behind the stumps on many occasions, is to give a talk on cricket before the presentation.

19 January 1952 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald

NEW LAY REPRESENTATIVES.

At the annual Parochial Church meeting which was held afterwards the following lay representatives were elected to the Ruri-decanal conference:—Mr. F. L. Crawford, Mr. Albert Castle and Miss M. S. Harris. To the Parochial Church Council were elected:—Mrs. Harold Ames, Mr. Rex Ames, Mr. G. Boughton, Mr. W. Edwards, Mr. J. Gibson, Mr. H. Mount, and Mr. F. Verney.

"MOVIES" FOR ELHAM.—A licence has recently been obtained for the showing of cinematograph pictures in the ex-Service Men's Hall and they are being shown every Tuesday night.

CRICKET CLUB DANCE.—A very successful and enjoyable dance was held in the ex-Service Men's Hall on Easter Monday evening. The dance was organised by the Committee of the Club. Mr. T. W. Geatman was an excellent M.C. and the Elham Jazz Band provided ideal music. About 70 people were present.

6 April 1929 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald

CRICKET CLUB.—The annual meeting of the Cricket Club was held on Saturday at the New Inn, under the chairmanship of the Captain of the Club (Captain A. C. Pickering). The report and balance sheet shewed that though weather conditions were against cricket last year, on the whole the Club had a very successful season. It had managed to clear off its liabilities and could start the forthcoming season with a balance in hand. The report was adopted. Successive speakers pointed out that Elham for many years had held a proud position amongst village clubs for providing real cricket, and that they had a further inspiration in the fact that Leslie Ames, one of their boys, now figured well in the County XI. They all wished him a successful season.

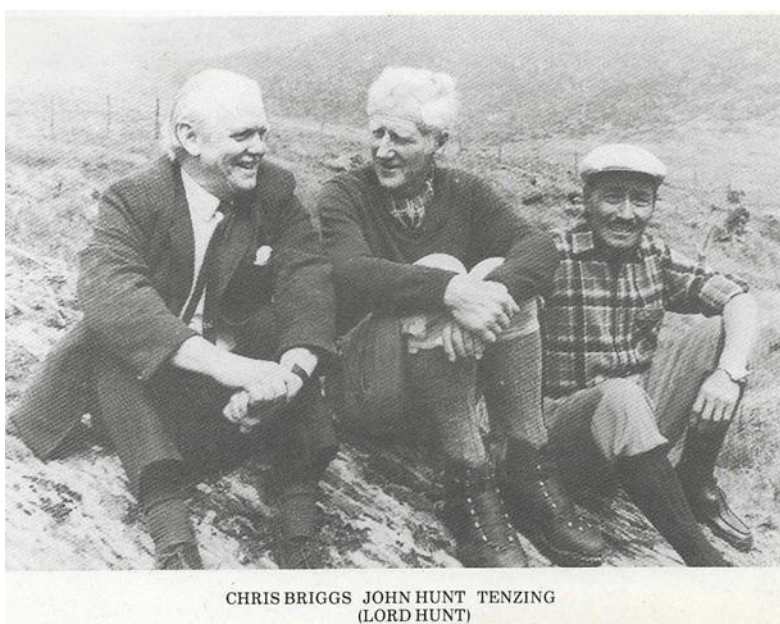
24 March 1928 Folkestone, Hythe, Sandgate and Cheriton Herald

Mountain memories by Derek

I was looking for something completely different (how often does that happen?), and I came across the book 'A Scrapbook of Snowdonia' by Vernon Hall. On the flyleaf I had noted that it was from Conrad and Betty at Christmas 1982, and that inscription and the book itself brought back a host of mostly happy memories.

Vernon Hall was a distinguished anaesthetist who had been present at the births of all the late Queen's children. He was also an enthusiastic rock climber, and the oddly titled 'A Scrapbook of Snowdonia' is actually an affectionate history of the Pen y Gwryd Hotel, which was the go-to place for British rock climbers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and gained further prestige when it hosted the training camp for the 1953 Everest Expedition, led by John Hunt. When you stayed at the Pen y Gwryd, as I did at least once every year from 1978 to 1992, you would be rubbing shoulders with many of the most distinguished figures in British mountaineering.

The Foreword to 'A Scrapbook of Snowdonia' was written by Lord Hunt, seen here with Chris Briggs, proprietor of the Pen y Gwryd, and Tenzing Norgay, who, with Edmund Hillary, made the first ascent.



CHRIS BRIGGS JOHN HUNT TENZING
(LORD HUNT)

I never met Hunt or Tenzing at the PYG (as I shall call it hereafter), but back in the sixties, when I worked at the Crown Agents on Millbank, Lord Hunt had his office as Director of the British Antarctic Survey in our building. I often exchanged greetings with him, and I can make the claim, which cannot be denied, that I was climbing one day and met Tenzing coming down. It's a mere detail that it was not on the South Col, but on a staircase in Westminster.

Back to the inscription in my copy. Conrad was Dr Conrad Hunter Smith, who was Elham's GP from 1940 to 1971. He was incredibly hard working and popular, but he had a problem, and it was known just before his retirement that he was about to face prosecution in relation to the misuse of prescription drugs. The support of the community was such that when a presentation was made to him at the old Village Hall on, fortunately, a warm summer evening, there were almost as many outside as in.

Mountain memories by Derek cont/..



The vicar, Jack Markham, made a very witty speech before handing over a small silver cream jug, with a cheque which, as he said, would ensure that the jug could be endlessly refilled.

After the court case, in which he lost the right to prescribe, Conrad was determined to rebuild his life. A spell in the addiction unit at Chartham Hospital helped, but his real game-changer was his joining and becoming an enthusiastic member of Alcoholics Anonymous. He also accepted a suggestion from his old friend Len Ironside, my boss at Hempton Farm Nurseries, that to come and do some physical work at the nursery might be a useful distraction, and good for his mental and physical well-being. And so it was.

As colleagues Conrad and I found that many interests in common, in the arts and music in particular, and a shared sense of humour. We also found that strenuous walks were mutually beneficial, first locally and then on the South Downs. In June 1977 we had nine days in the Lake District without a drop of rain. That was my first experience of British mountains, but it was extraordinarily atypical to be climbing Scafell Pike in intense heat. That same day the Lord's test match was severely curtailed by bad light, and my father lit the fire in the bar at the Prince of Wales, Rhodes Minnis.

In 1978 we made the first trip to the PYG, which Conrad had known in his youth. Chris Briggs was still the proprietor, but he had handed over the management to his daughter Jane. The day we arrived she had gone into Bangor Hospital to have her first child, and Chris and his wife Jo were back in harness, and we learned that she was a Piper from Tan Barn Farm at Acrise. I had been at Elham Primary School with one of her nieces, and another played the organ at the chapel at Wingmore.

Mountain memories by Derek cont/..



CHRIS AND JO BRIGGS
With daughter Jane and son-in-law Brian

The PYG was something of a time-warp. Maybe it was different for the distinguished guests along the corridor, but for most of us there were no en-suite facilities, and it was a scramble to get the best of the four bathrooms. The two internal ones were claustrophobic, and my favourite was the one at the rear with a clear glass window looking out to the lower slopes of the Glyders, with an enormous bath with industrial size taps, where you could soak in Victorian splendour.

That week we made ascents of Snowdon and other peaks, but most memorably Tryfan, said to be the only peak in England and Wales that you cannot climb without using your hands. Conrad recalled with some emotion that he had spent his twenty-first birthday on Tryfan, so drunk that he really frightened himself, and resolved to give up mountains. It took him over forty years to realise that it should have been the booze that he renounced, but when he did it led to some great times for him, and for me.

The Betty of the inscription was Conrad's second wife. She was Irish, so many of our rendezvous in North Wales were as they were returning after visiting her family. Having two cars made linear walks possible, and Betty was good company as she joined us on all but the most strenuous.

Britain's mountains are as nothing compared with the great ranges of the world, but they have to be treated with respect. Four times I have been on a mountain when someone died on it the same day, twice on Tryfan, once on Lliwedd, when a climber fell off, and, rather bizarrely, on a calm and sunny September day when I 'bagged' Carn Mor Dearg and Ben Nevis, and a chap from Boughton Aluph came off his mountain bike further down the Ben.

Mountain memories by Derek cont/..

Chris Briggs had been a pioneer with the Snowdon mountain rescue team, and a recent series on BBC2 has highlighted the work of the Eryri Mountain Rescue Team, as it is now known. Several of its successful rescues featured have been on Tryfan, including one of a woman who had been to the summit to scatter her father's ashes, and fell into a gulley on the descent. Fortunately I suffered no such indignity when I scattered Conrad's ashes on what would have been his eighty-first birthday in 1992. It is perhaps fitting that that was my last visit to North Wales, though it was always my intention to go back and make an ascent of Snowdon by the Snowdon Ranger Path, the only recognised walking route that I had not used. As it turned out, that never happened, but I can look back with pleasure and a bit of pride at over twenty ascents, from the very pedestrian, up the railway track, and the very long, the Watkin Path, to the very challenging, over Crib Goch and the Pinnacles, which I did eight times. And now to walk a few yards is an effort.....



Conrad on the Crib Goch Pinnacles, aged 76

One year a guy staying at the PYG found a camera near the summit of Pen yr Ole Owen. When we examined it in the evening, it was just possible to make out the address as 'Martyrs' Field Road', and on the assumption that there couldn't be another street thus named, I agreed to bring it home, and as soon as I could knocked at the relevant door in Canterbury. It was clear that the elderly lady who answered had not recently been on a Welsh summit; she had given it to her grandson to use on a trip to Snowdonia with Simon Langton Boys' School (the Langton had a hut in Snowdonia for many years). He hadn't confessed the loss to Granny, but I got a grateful note from him thanking me for its return, and saying that they had been able to develop the film.

And one last recollection, another example of the small world syndrome. I was on my own on this occasion and, as it was a foul morning, I spent the day on Anglesey, where it was clear. When I returned to the mainland in the late afternoon it was sparkling, so I couldn't resist going up Snowdon. As I drew into the Pen y Pass car park, so did another chap, who asked if he could accompany me if I knew the route. It transpired that he was a lecturer from an agricultural college in North Yorkshire who had been to a conference at Bangor University. It was not surprising that we had an acquaintance or two in common in the world of agriculture and horticulture, but we were both gobsmacked to realise that we had a mutual friend in Les Wardlow, entomologist at Wye College, as was Les when I told him of this entirely chance encounter.

2024

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Everyone will have their own special areas of interest so, to stop us banging on about our own obsessions, send us your thoughts and photos etc. Letters to the Editor are always appreciated!

Please email me:

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