

# HAMBROOK MARSHES HISTORY SCRAPBOOK

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*The following notes in no way provide a 'history' of Hambrook. The aim has been to bring together background material on ten aspects of past life in the area - spanning time from Caesar's invasion to quarrying on the site post WW2. Footnotes indicate the main sources used.*

## 1. Caesar 54BC

One of the points of entry to Hambrook Marshes, the footbridge at the Tonford end of the site, is thought to be the spot where Julius Caesar forded the River Stour to start his invasion of England in 54BC. His first battle against the Britons can be located at Bigbury, a large fortified enclosure that can be seen on the skyline looking north-west from the bridge. Original construction of the fort has been dated to around 100BC.

We have the events of that day in Caesar's own word, as he recorded them in The Gallic Wars Book 5:

*"We marched by night [from Deal] for about 12 miles before coming in sight of the enemy forces. They had moved with their cavalry and chariots down from the higher ground [Bigbury] to a river [the Stour] and were trying ... to engage us in battle. When our cavalry drove them back they hid in the wood where they enjoyed a position with extremely good man made defences ... because many trees had been cut down and used to block entrances to it [the fort]. The Britons came out of the woods in small groups to fight .... But the men of the Seventh Legion holding up their shields to form a protective shell piled up earth against the fortifications and captured the place."<sup>1</sup>*



Tonford bridge

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<sup>1</sup> see Blean Heritage and Community Group website at <http://www.theblean.co.uk/wildlife-heritage/key-events-in-history/battle-of-bigbury/>

## 2. Gray's elegy

*The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea*  
THOMAS GRAY

The poet Thomas Gray (1716-71) wrote his *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* in 1750 and it was first published in 1751. It became the poet's best known work. Many will know the opening lines (quoted above) from their school days.

Gray was closely associated with Stoke Poges church (Buckinghamshire) and was buried there. Most assumed that the poem referred to this church. Initial doubts arose as Stoke Poges church has no curfew bell, and there is no sign of local cows winding slowly over meadows.

A possible solution to the puzzle was published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1857<sup>2</sup>. It relied on the following facts: 1) Gray was known to have had several close friends in and around Canterbury<sup>3</sup>: 2) a Canterbury resident Miss A M Lukyn<sup>4</sup> who knew Gray reported that the church in question was not Stoke Poges but was Thanington; 3) on still evenings the 8PM curfew bell of Canterbury cathedral can be heard by walkers near Thanington - on Hambrook for example; 4) there are plenty of Hambrook examples of cows making their way home over meadows<sup>5</sup>.



Thomas Gray and a churchyard - but which one?

<sup>2</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* December 1857 p 661

<sup>3</sup> in particular a 'Mr Drew a medical man of this city' - it would be helpful to know more of this Canterbury doctor

<sup>4</sup> Anna Maria Lukyn 1752-1835 daughter of Rev Anthony Lukyn 1727-1778 rector of St Mildred's Canterbury

<sup>5</sup> For more details see the website of Thanington council at: <http://www.thanington-pc.gov.uk/history/history1.html>

### 3. We'll gather lilacs

*Eastward, beyond the water meadows, look  
There Canterbury, now a neutral grey,  
Stands Credo high, wearing the time of day.*

CHRISTOPER HASSALL

*We'll gather lilacs in the spring again  
And walk together down an English lane  
Until our hearts have learnt to sing again  
When you come home once more*

IVOR NOVELLO

Tonford Manor, a private house, is a Grade II listed building which stands close to the western boundary of Hambrook Marshes. It incorporates the remains of a 15th century fortified house. Between the wars it was owned, and lived in, by Christopher Hassall (1912-1963), a successful English actor, dramatist and poet. For 15 years Hassall worked closely with Ivor Novello (1893-1951) the celebrated Welsh composer and actor, Hassall writing lyrics to musicals and Novello composing the music. Novello was a frequent visitor to Tonford, and would certainly have walked the nearby Hambrook Marshes.

Novello had enormous success with his stage musical *Perchance to Dream* (1945), in particular the hit song *We'll gather lilacs in the spring again*. It caught the mood of the age (end of World War II) with its theme of parted couples who yearned to be together again. Local tradition has it that Novello was inspired by his countryside walks whilst staying at the Manor, including those on Hambrook. The moving song was played at Novello's cremation in 1951.

It's tempting to plant some lilacs on Hambrook to bolster this charming story!



*Tonford manor*



*Ivor Novello*

#### 4. Thomas Sidney Cooper

We are lucky to have paintings by Thomas Sidney Cooper and members of his family as these show us how Hambrook Marshes looked between 1830 and 1900. Two examples of many appear below:



*View of Canterbury from Tonford, with cattle by T S Cooper (1835)  
courtesy Canterbury Museums and galleries*



*Canterbury Meadows by Thomas George Cooper (1856)  
courtesy Canterbury Museums and galleries*

## 5. Boundary stones

Canterbury enjoyed county status, separate from Kent, from the 1500s onwards. With the coming of county boroughs and setting up of County Councils in 1888, Canterbury was again, amazingly, granted separate county status. At the time its population of around 25,000 was just half the target threshold of 50,000, and also half that of the second smallest county borough. The reorganisation of 1972 removed this privilege, but the boundaries of Canterbury County survive partially in the form of marker stones. The first below (at present covered liberally in graffiti spray) lies on Hambrook - the other is nearby at Wincheap.



*the only county boundary stone on Hambrook - distance shot and in detail (taken in 2010)*



*partially hidden county boundary stone at Wincheap entrance*

## 6. Whitehall Inn

Whitehall Inn (now Whitehall Farm) lies just outside Hambrook Marshes beyond the Whitehall Road level crossing<sup>6</sup>. Licensing returns of 1723-1760<sup>7</sup> show John Homersham as inn-keeper of the 'Whitehall'. Later, it was owned by the Poor Priests' Hospital and appears in their property deeds<sup>8</sup> from about 1810 as 'Mud House otherwise Whitehall Farm'. By 1830 it was operating again as a public house - its publican Edward Pilcher is mentioned in the Morning Advertiser (a London paper for the pub trade) as an insolvent debtor. For the next 80 years the pub appears in the local press for a wide variety of reasons: advertisements (see below) refer to the bowling green and 'Trap Club' ie bat and trap games (1860s); bankruptcy of the landlord (1867); coroner's hearings held at the pub after fatal accidents on the railway line (1870); annual dinner of the Stour Fisheries Association (1876); evidence in court cases eg a seduction case surrounding the pregnancy of 14 year old Canterbury girl Clara Paine (1883); hop growing reports as hops grew close to the pub (1893); suicides on the line followed by inquests held at the pub - John Cornish age 32 of St Peter's Lane having lost his job as a coal carter lay on the line and the next train removed the top of his head (1900); and fines suffered by the landlord for serving out of hours and refusing to open his door to police (1904). The pub closed just before World War II.

**WHITEHALL INN.**  
TO THE INHABITANTS OF CANTERBURY AND  
ITS VICINITY.  
**H**AVING taken the above premises, I beg to inform  
you that arrangements have been (and will be)  
made to secure the comfort of those who may kindly  
patronize this establishment. The Bowling Green (now  
in good condition) is available for Bowls during the week,  
excepting Tuesday, on which occasion the Trap Club is  
held.  
**SHEPHERD, NEAME, and Co.'s SPARKLING ALES.**  
**LONDON PORTER.**  
**Spirits of the Choicest Description.**  
Your humble servant,  
**JOHN JULL.**  
Whitehall, April, 1865.

Canterbury Journal 6 May 1865



Whitehall Inn postcard 1908



around 1930

<sup>6</sup> see *Harbledown Heritage* ed. Peter Osborne (Harbledown Conservation Association, 2000) p40; also Dover Kent Archives at <http://www.dover-kent.com/2014-villages/Harbledown.html>

<sup>7</sup> Kent Archives CKS Licensing returns Q/RLV 3/3 and 3/4

<sup>8</sup> Canterbury Cathedral Archives CCA-CC-P/2/41 and CCA-CC-P/2/44/1

## 7. City water supply

A new water pumping house was built in Wincheap in 1869. It stood on what is now the Dunelm site - the Dunelm store (built 2001) mimics the architectural style of the original pump house. Prior to 1869 the city obtained its water from water tanks in the castle, which took its supply from the Stour. The new source proved a vast improvement on the old - it was clean, odourless, constant 51°F, and under mains pressure. Water was drawn from two deep bore holes in the chalk at the rate of 1000 gallons a minute, and pumped under pressure through a main pipe to a 350,000 gallon holding tank on the top of St Thomas' Hill, near what is now Kent College. The tank was 60ft across and nearly 20ft deep, half underground and the rest above. Attached to the wall of the Chief Engineer's office in Wincheap was a telescope trained on the holding tank on the hill 1½ miles to the north. His eyes were focused on a large red disc, cut in two - the upper half was fixed but the lower half was attached to a float in the holding tank. By this wonderfully 'Heath Robinson' arrangement, the Chief Engineer could know when the holding tank was full. A supplementary water tower was constructed in 1928. The entire storage system was taken out of use in 1993. The main pipe can still be seen crossing the Stour and Hambrook; the water tower still stands and is visible from the Tonford end of Hambrook.



1928 water tower on  
St Thomas' Hill

water supply pipes cross the Stour (above)  
and the Whitehall stream (below)

## 8. Elham Valley railway line

This railway line was built in the 1880s. It carried passengers from genteel Canterbury to fashionable Folkestone. The line was particularly popular with those using Canterbury South station to attend Cricket Week. It only had a 60 year lifespan. Following World War II it couldn't compete with increasing motor car ownership, and closed in 1947. But the presence of the railway can still be seen all along the line - disused bridges, tunnels, station buildings and embankments like that surviving on Hambrook.

In February 1942 the Elham rail bridge bore the weight of the largest gun in the British army, the 250 ton Boche Buster gun as it made its way to Bishopsbourne. To protect it from enemy action it was disguised as crates of bananas!



*Boche buster*



*original Elham Valley line bridge*



## 9. Hambrook family

The area now known as Hambrook Marshes took its name from the Hambrook family, dairy farmers who kept cattle on the marshes from around 1900 to 1950. Prior to this they were known as Whitehall Marshes. Much of what follows is based on information and advice kindly provided by Hambrook family descendants, particularly by Anne Fisher.

Ralph Harvey Hambrook (1874-1946) purchased Hambrook about the time of the First World War. He was formerly running a dairy farm at Ewell Minnis near Dover. His only child, Herbert Leslie Hambrook (1904-1961), is listed as a dairyman in local directories, but had interests in several other fields. The Hambrooks sold Thanington Court Farm in the late 1940s. It was then acquired by Thomas Brett and Sons.

The photo below (right) shows two related businesses in Iron Bar Lane. One is Thanington Court Dairy, which sold 'real dairy ice cream' and supplied ice lollies over much of East Kent. The lollies were produced in the cellar of a house in Wincheap on the corner of York Road. The other is Herbert's stamp business. Up until the late 1950s both businesses were run from a single prefab on the bomb site of the old Longmarket.

On the death of Herbert Hambrook in 1961, his daughter June ran the Dairy café and his son Peter took over the stamp shop, until the lease expired in 1980.



*Ralph in the 1930s with grandchildren  
Peter and June*



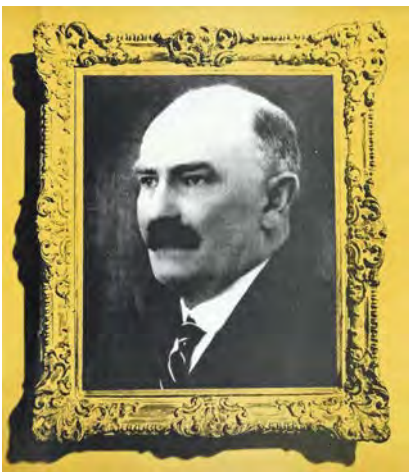
*Iron Bar Lane in the 1960s*



*cattle on Hambrook*

## 10. Brett's

Robert Brett, a farmer's son, came to Canterbury from Deal in the 1880s to work for 3 (old) pence an hour for George Finn, a traction engine proprietor in Wincheap<sup>9</sup>. By 1889 he had married his landlady's daughter - they went on to create a family of four boys and three girls. After the death of George Finn, Robert built a haulage business of his own operating from Wincheap - first traction engines, then steam tractors, steam wagons, supply of flints and clinker for road construction, and finally quarrying. The business became a limited company in 1928 and grew steadily in the 1930s and 1940s. During the war years it had to switch to large scale armaments work, making tanks and guns. Its vehicle fleet and output of sand and gravel were devoted to defence work. Brett's main office in St George's Place was narrowly missed in the bombing raid in June 1942. At the time of the Hambrook acquisition, around 1950, the company was working at full stretch on reconstruction work in Canterbury and other East Kent towns. During the following 54 years, the Hambrook site was quarried for sand and gravel - large quantities ended up in the new A2 road which crosses the site. The quarried areas were then back-filled, leaving the site looking much as it looked before. These changes are however reflected in the Hambrook flora: tussock grass survives only at the undisturbed margins of the site, and isolated lone plant species survive in the back-filled earth. The new rural Hambrook site was purchased by Kent Enterprise Trust in 2004, who sold it to the present owners, Love Hambrook Marshes, a decade later.



*Robert Brett 1869-1941*



*war damage St George's Place*

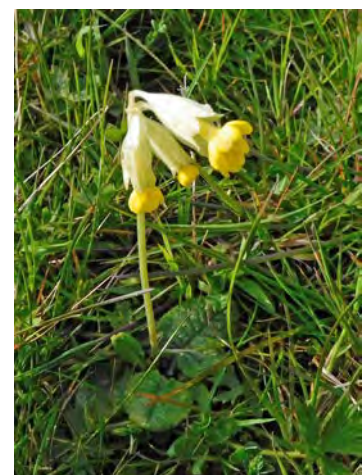


*tussock grass*



Three members of the Brett family involved in running the company. Left to right: Mr Tim Brett, group chairman, Mr John Brett, deputy chairman, and Mr Anthony Brett, division director.

*Management team in the 1960s*



*isolated cowslip*

<sup>9</sup> see undated booklet '1904 - 1979' issued to celebrate the firm's 75th jubilee; also article in Kent Herald 26 June 1979