

Darenth: By a Modern Chronicler.

The following is an article from the "Kentish Times". Friday, February 24, 1939.

In Kentish Villages.-IX.

A Village of Nicknames.

The Ludlow Cricket Team.

Man of a Thousand Jobs.

The Legend of Rats' Castle.

In those distant, one almost feels inclined to say legendary days of which we hear the good old people of the village tell, when winters were winters, and snow was never absent from their repertoire; when there were no trains or buses, and it was necessary to walk miles to school, to church, to shop; when a days labour lasted a day and not a mere eight hours. In those dim and distant days, how did the villagers' pass their admittedly restricted leisure? Talking, reading, arguing, drinking before the cottage fire, or in the equally cosy bar parlour no doubt. So must it have been at Darenth, but I shrewdly deem that the people of Darenth had their peculiar diversion -none other than that of inventing nicknames for their fellow villagers! This is no idle conjecture, when one reads in the parish magazine of the church of St.Margarets, that fifty years ago at Darenth village street, or over the hill at Lanes End, one might pass the time of day with "Tip" Whiffen, "Weekly" Bevan, "Waxy" Munn, "Nipper" Stoneham, "Dag" Mephram, and "Whip" White. The custom indeed is not one honoured by antiquity alone. Today in Darenth village street or over the hill at Lanes End, one might pass the time of day with "Nipper Phillips", "Jock White", and the "Ludlows", "Dodger", "Sharper", "Pinky", while old "Pompey's" ghost will be lurking somewhere about, his beloved cricket bat over his shoulder.

Never was there such a region on this earth for nicknames. A Student of the subject however in conducting an investigation into the phenomenon would find himself up against a brick wall. Not a single villager of Darenth knows how he acquired his nickname- Stay! there is one, seventy-six year old "Dodger"[Elvin James,1862-1952] of that famous family of "Ludlow's". When he was a lad, he told me, that love of cricket, which courses in the veins of every Ludlow worthy of the name, led him to offer himself as candidate for the fine old "Green Street Green" Cricket Club, when both in age and stature he was inferior to his fellows. Young and small though he might be, he was a Ludlow, and the cricket club members did not take long to assess his prowess, and so on the cricket field of a Saturday afternoon was to be seen this little fellow dodging about among his seniors. "Dodger" was christened. At Darenth, cricket and the Ludlows' are synonymous terms. On occasion a team of Ludlows' has turned out complete with umpire and scorer, almost invariably to get the better of the toughest opposition.

"POMPEY THE GREAT"

The cricketing patriarch was "Pompey",[Frank?1859-1921] the brother of "Dodger". Their father, John Ludlow [1820-1895] certainly played for Green Street Green also, in the days when top hats were worn, and all bowling was under-arm, but Pompey is the first to make a stir in recorded history. He was a great all-rounder, and in his day, played for the Kent County Colts. To Green Street Green, the parish cricket club of Darenth, he was a tower of strength, while there are men in the village now who have memories of how as lads, they strove to demolish the wicket that in his later years he would set up on the Green at Lanes End, each stump of which bore a penny. It was seldom that the village lads were the richer, and Pompey the poorer at the end of a day of

sport for both.

"Dodger" (his Christian name is Elvin), was scarcely overshadowed by his cricketing brother. He began to aid the club at the age of sixteen, and as a medium-pace bowler with a dangerous swerve, rendered sterling service to it over a period of years. He also assisted Darenth Asylum (now the Park), for a number of years in the days when Dr. Rotheram and Dr. White were doughty wielders of the willow. His employment at that institution being of the duration of thirty-three years.

"HAWLEY DISMISSED FOR FIVE RUNS"

He [Elvin] is now the oldest member of the Ludlow team living (Pompey died some few years ago), and has many memories of the games in which the family has played. Most vivid is his recollection of that game against Hawley, in which the Ludlows' dismissed their opponents for five runs. Dodger had an analysis of 7 wickets for 2 runs, while Pompey took 3 for 3.

Only once were the Ludlows' beaten, and that in their last match in 1935, when they represented the team of Colonel the Hon. A.G. McDonnell, against Green Street Green, of which club the Colonel is President. Dodger has been an all-round sportsman. He told me of the time at Horton Kirby Sports, when he beat another fine old veteran, Alf Hall, of the "Colyers Arms", Betsham in a contest for throwing the cricket ball. Dodger threw 106, his rival 102 yards. Shooting has always been another favourite pastime of the father of the Ludlows', which is not surprising, seeing that his father was Gamekeeper to Mr. John Russel of Sutton.

Dodger Ludlow lives at 9, Lincolnshire Terrace, Lanes End. Away up behind his cottage at no. 40 on the height of Watchgate Rise, on the new Dartford Rural District Council Housing Estate, which has augmented so considerably the population of Darenth, I met "Sharper", otherwise Mr. Walter Ludlow, [1860-1940] another keen cricketer. He represented Green Street Green for over 20 years, and he also talked to me at length of the redoubtable Pompey. He told me of how the great man issued many a challenge to all comers to take him on at a game of single-wicket cricket, and how on one memorable occasion a man of the name Spice of Crockenhill accepted the challenge. Pompey got him out alright, declares Dodger, continuing the tale, but he couldn't get Pompey out, even by throwing the ball at him.

"PLAYED FOR THEIR SUPPER"

Sharper's first appearance on the cricket field occurred 68 years ago, when he was one of two teams of boys who played for a bread and cheese supper, provided by farmers Marchant & Mugeridge. He also was one of the eleven invincible "Ludlows'", and he told me that one of their finest victories was that achieved against Silvertown before the war. In the Silvertown side was due to appear the County player Jupp, so that few people were prepared to back the Ludlows to win. However Jupp arrived late, and in accordance with the rules had to bat last. Consequently his menace to the visitors was temporarily averted. However the menace proved to be one of anticipation only, for on opening the second innings, the County player was bowled out for a couple or so, and the Ludlows' ran out winners handsomely. Incidentally, before this game, members of the crowd declared the namesake eleven to look more like "pudding eaters" than cricketers, and the Ludlows' have a reputation in the village for being valiant trenchermen. They are also no mean singers, and many are the members of the clan who have sang in St. Margaret's choir. Once upon a time they formed a handbell ringing team, a service of great entertainment to their fellow villagers.

Among them has been Sharper, and still today he has the ear and voice for a song. He has spent all his days in the village (as have the majority of Ludlows'), and attended the old school at the top of the hill. When this was closed he had to walk to Southfleet every day. He spent three years in White's cement factory, a number of months on the old South Eastern Railway, and for 26 years was employed by Mr. W. Anthony Cornford, of Chalk Croft. He can remember when the parish lock-up stood on the Green, but to his knowledge, no one was ever locked up there in his time. It was pulled down 70 years ago.

Sharper's brother Albert, [1873-1941] (it is a mystery why he has not achieved a nickname), who lives at 12, Stanley Cottages, is no whit behind his relatives (all Ludlows' are related, however distantly) in his

enthusiasm and aptitude for the game of cricket.

So enthusiastic was he in days past, that it was nothing for him to walk, often with his father "Tommy", [Thomas, 1830-1908] a typical Ludlow, to the Bat & Ball Ground at Gravesend to see County matches, and when he met and married Mrs. Albert Ludlow, [nee-Sarah Elizabeth Taylor 1872-1947] he found himself life-partner to one who shared whole-heartedly his love of the game.

"W.G." On the field all day.

Husband and wife walked to Gravesend together on that day in 1893 when W.G. Grace accomplished the unique performance of being on the field throughout the entire duration of the match. Kent batted first, so that Grace was fieldsman and bowler for Gloucester, for whom he opened the first innings in their turn. He knocked up a glorious 288, carrying his bat, and then was once more bowling and fielding. When Gloucester came to bat again, the Doctor again opened the innings, and once more he accomplished the feat of carrying his bat. Mrs. Albert Ludlow scored for the pleasure, it gave her every run registered by "W.G."

Albert Ludlow was captain and secretary of Green Street Green for eight or nine years in the nineties. His Grandfather, Jack Ludlow [John 1806-1873] known as "Old I say", from his frequent use of the phrase, who kept the "Ship" in the seventies, in his day practically financed and ran the team. [John actually kept the "White Hart", not "The Ship".]

In those days the opposing teams would play for a new ball, which would become the property of the winners, and at one time in those early days the club would field two teams. Albert told me that the Ludlow team played on an average from two to four games a year in the days of and following his captaincy of the village side. An unusual fixture was that with the eleven Hollands of Fawkham, an event to which the countryside surrounding looked forward. There were many fine cricketers in the side in those days, including Mr. Alfred Treadwell of the Manor House, captain for a number of years: the brothers Longhurst, Mark, George, and Bill; Sidney and Frank Clinch; Mr. T.C. Tristram, of St. Margarets, and his brothers; George and Wally White; Frank Armstrong, Evenden and Barnes. None of their supporters could have been more ardent than Mrs. Albert Ludlow, who met her husband when both were school monitors at a wage of 1s. a week. Mrs. Ludlow went on to become a qualified teacher, and she taught first at the school "on the Green", (now St. Luke's church), later as assistant to Miss Beeney at the Gore (where now is Mr. E. Gatfield, of Waylands dairy), and finally as Headmistress at the latter school until 1900.

Today, both she and her husband are equally enthusiastic in their support of the present team, at this day containing more than one Ludlow, though no longer Arthur, who lives at 13, Little Dale, and who has been its secretary for the past eight years.

It is as much a matter of regret to me as it is to himself that when he took over the secretaryship in 1930, he found that in times past, no records had been kept, so that for early history one has to rely solely upon the memories of past players and supporters. There is no record of the date of the founding of the club, the nearest approach to it being statement of Mr. George Millams, the oldest inhabitant of Darenth, that cricket was being played "on the Green" by a flourishing Green Street Green side when he was a lad back in 1861. As far as possible the club has always relied upon local talent, Arthur Ludlow informed me, it has produced some excellent players, including W. May and A. Osbon [!], who went on to Dartford Albion before the war [1st. war]. But though many have gone on to higher spheres there have always been plenty to take their place. The outstanding player of post-war years undoubtedly has been H. (Nipper) Phillips, who scored the first century for the side some years ago in extraordinary fashion.

"A WHIRLWIND CENTURY"

The Green's opponents were Hall's of Dartford, who having run up a good score, left their visitors a seemingly impossible task in knocking off runs. The seeming hopelessness of the situation put "Nipper" on his mettle. He went in to give a whirlwind display, scoring with bewildering rapidity, and the necessary runs for victory were obtained with twenty minutes to spare. "Nippers" contribution was 110 not out. Since then both C. Rayner and W. Wilson have won "Jack Hob's" bats for scoring centuries. Nipper Phillips has also proved himself a remarkably fine bowler. In the past eight seasons he has taken 544 wickets at a cost of approximately

three runs a piece, a wonderful record of consistency.

Arthur Ludlow played for 30 years until 1936, when he was forced to retire from the game for reasons of health. he told me that in his day the club has received loyal support from the cricketing families of- Treadwell, Tristram, White and Hassel, while among it's notable supporters have been Mr.A.M.fleet,J.P.,D.L., Mr.T.C.Tristram,J.P., Mr.M.S.Wood and Mr.C.J.Woodward.

Undoubtedly the match of the year is that against a team led by Colonel McDonnell, on August Bank Holiday, which is associated with lunch and tea for both teams at the Clock House, the home of the President.

Longfield are the great rivals. In the past, Green Street Green have had rather the better of the exchanges, but in the last few years, Longfield have been hitting back hard. They have however yet to avenge that defeat when they were dismissed for four runs, E.Ludlow taking five for one, and Nipper five for three.

Former captains of the club have been: Albert Ludlow, W.White, A.Chapman, A.Sawkins, H.Phillips, Arthur Ludlow, F.Henderson and W.Attree. last season C.Rayner filled the role, while W.Ablet has been elected for next season. Those who have undertaken the secretaryship have included: S.Wood, S.Summers, J.Young and E Ludlow. It is seldom that a side takes the field without a Ludlow of their number. Regarding the Ludlow team, Mr.Arthur Ludlow told me that one could still be put in the field, but it would be something of a veteran side.

All however are not Ludlows` at Darenth, although the story that at one time, the passer-by who, meeting a wayfarer in the dark at Lanes End, wished him "Good night Mr.Ludlow", would not be far wrong, while if he were wrong, his error could be remedied for certain by the greeting "Good night Mr.White.

To this other famous family belongs "Jock" White, who was baptised George, and whose retirement from the post of verger of St.Margaret's two and a half years ago brought to an end a family connection with that office that persisted for nearly 100 years.

"Jock's" father, Harry White, was verger before his son, and his grandfather , Thomas White, before him, so that the dead of Darenth for three generations have been buried by a White.

Grandfather White was also village constable, and his grandson recalls hearing him tell of his next-door neighbour who deserted from the Army, and hid from the adjacent officer of the law behind sheets on a clothes-horse before the fire.

Another tale which old Thomas White used to tell concerns a predecessor in the role of verger, who one day fell asleep during the sermon. Awakening suddenly, he cried out "Fill the pot Viner", Viner then being landlord of the Chequers.

When "Jock's" father was verger, music was provided by an old hand-manipulated organ with "rolls" similar to those of a pianola. As a result, there was a very small repertoire of hymns, which the organist did his best to arrange in such a manner as to infuse variety into the services. One advantage was that the congregation soon knew them all by heart.

Mr.White was born at Darenth, and apart from a sojourn of two years at Hawley, has lived there all his life. He began to assist his father in his duties as verger while a young man, and in due time succeeded him.

He can relate many amusing experiences, notably that of the couple who came to church with the purpose of being wed, but upon learning that the fee would be 13s.1d., went away still single. It's too much declared the husband. One wonders whether he changed his mind later, and what the lady thought about it.

Church-going some years ago was more of a habit than it is today, and there was one devout old parishioner, by name Whistler, who on a Sunday used to bring his mid-day meal in a red handkerchief to St.Margarets, and eat it in the interval between morning and afternoon service, in the precincts of the church, so far away was his home from the house of religion.

Obliging Verger-Godfather to Hundreds.

Few people in the whole wide world can have stood godfather to so many children as the former verger of Darenth. The parish boasted a gypsy encampment until not very many years ago, and once a year these wanderers would bring their children to church to be baptised.

Every mother must have a godfather for her little one, and as for the most part the gypsy men-folk stayed away, presumably contemning such practices, who else could serve but the obliging verger? Obliging was "Jock" at all times, so that his god-children number many hundreds-"though how I was ever expected to carry out my duties, goodness knows," he declares.

His grandfather, father and brothers were all wood-cutters, who made hoops for tubs and girdles for gates in Darenth Woods. His father it was who perpetrated the "shooting of the fox," an incident which is still the subject of reminiscence in the village.

Mr. Harry William was not, however, as might seem, guilty of the most deadly of all sins in the eyes of hunting people. He shot the fox, certainly, but it was the "Fox and Hounds", [the public house at Lanes End] through the ceiling of which he discharged a shot-gun, not knowing it was loaded.

Jock spent 40 years of his life at the old Darenth Paper Mill, which closed down eight years ago. He worked in the rag-house, of which he was supervisor. As a lad and young man, he played cricket for Hawley, while at one time he was a member of nigger minstrel troupe in the same village. He was verger under four vicars, Canon Bingham Stevens, Canon H.T. Powell, the Rev. Howland, and the Rev. E.G. Pratt. When he resigned, a collection was held for him through the village, and he was presented with a cheque.

The Roman Villa.

It was he who cut the first spit of turf that concealed the Roman Villa on Court Lodge Farm, today owned by Mr. James Langlands. Mr. T. Marchant, Manager of the Mill, taking him up there to excavate. The excavation of this Villa, undertaken by a Mr. Payne, antiquarian, of Rochester, caused quite a stir at the time, and Jock can remember when horse-brakes by the hundred brought sight-seers from London.

A fair amount of interesting relics were taken, many of them to the Dartford Museum, from the site, which was then abandoned. It is now so overgrown as to be almost unrecognisable.

It was Mr. White who told me of how Jimmy Blake used to ride the old boar. As a young lad Jimmy adopted this unusual steed, and for many years the boy riding on the back of the pig was a familiar sight in Darenth. What was more, when Jimmy and the boar went into the cornfield, and breakfast time came, if the boar did not have the first piece of bread, he would fly at his master. And if a storm broke, at the first clap of thunder the boar would run to Jimmy and wait for him to mount.

"No one else could ride the pig but Jimmy."

No one else could ride the pig but Jimmy. If any of the other village lads climbed on his back he would walk straight into the river.

This same Jimmy Blake, when he grew up and was employed by Mr. Marchant at Court Lodge Farm, became champion ploughman of the district for a number of years. He won his title at the ploughing matches which until not very long ago were an annual feature of the villages, and in which often as many as 120 ploughs took part.

His son Mr. Jim Blake, who lives at South Darenth, is today ploughman at Court Lodge Farm, under Mr. J. Langlands.

The "Oldest Inhabitant."

As aforementioned, the oldest inhabitant of Darenth is 85 year-old Mr. George Milliams, of Valley-Cottages. Old in years Mr. Milliams may be, but his heart is yet young. When Mr. Milliams laughs his long, contagious laugh, the sunny humour of his disposition is made clear even to the most casual observer.

Yes, Mr. Milliams is a happy man. In Darenth he is accepted as a real wit, while there is little of a social nature that happens within the borders of the parish at which he does not make one of the company.

He was born at Maiden's Elm Cottage in Pig's Field, and except for a short period spent in service, has lived at Darenth all his life. Mr. Thomas Chapman, of St. Margaret's, was lord of the manor in his young days, while Mr. Henry Chapman lived at Darenth Farm, and Miss Chapman in Oakfield-Lane, all three houses being of the same type.

Mr. Milliams father, Richard, and his Uncle John, were mole-catchers, whose duties took them on the round of the farms in the parish and its vicinity. He did not follow in their footsteps, however, and in the course of his life has had experience of several types of employment.

As a boy of ten he went to work for Mr. Cripps at the Malthouse, for a wage of 1s. 6d. a week. When he

moved to St. Margarets his wages for "bird-minding" were raised to 3s. 6d. Next he was sheep-boy, and then he went catching moles with his father for a short season.

"Best Thatcher in the District."

Thatching was the next task to which he turned his hand, linking his fortunes for fourteen years with those of Harry Goodwin "the best thatcher in the district," and then to pastures new he roved, becoming roundsman to Mr. Summers, the baker, of Green Street Green.

Taking round the daily bread in those days was a somewhat more arduous task than it is today. It was nothing for George Milliams to collide with his horse or lampless cart on a foggy night, while if it rained, his customers were liable to receive sodden bread, there being no covered-in carts in those days.

Sixteen years at the Asylum was his longest sojourn in any one place of employment. After that he did a little "jobbing"- and "jobbing" about his own attractive garden one may find him today, unless he is chopping wood, or down in the potato field.

Mr. Milliams gives one of his hearty chuckles as he tells of the old club feasts up on the Green. As in other villages, the annual feast was at one time the day of days for the villagers, and he can remember many a time answering to the call, "Push up, boys," as he strained at one of the handles of the hand-manipulated roundabout.

After an hour or so of exertion spent in this manner, he would be rewarded with a free ride for his labours. The dept cleared, we follow him across to the pond where he joins the throng splitting its sides over the antics of those who have braved the greasy pole for a ham.

Fun on the Greasy Pole.

The pole was a bowsprit, and beneath it was the water of the pond, so that there was abundant cause for amusement.

All Mr. Milliams reminiscences are interesting. He remembers when Mr. Martin, who lived at Pycroft [probably Ryecroft], the home today of Mr. L.U.Judge, inaugurated a drum and fife band. He heard them play the first tune they learned, "Hold the fort, for I am coming," with a man of the name of Humphrey at their head banging the big drum. Unfortunately, with the departure of Mr. Martin from the district his band soon passed out of existence.

Mr. Milliams has a most vivid recollection of the "Great Flood" which followed a thunderstorm in the years before the turn of the century. In those days his late wife's father and family lived in a bungalow in the Betsham road. Down the Betsham road came the deluge, flooding the bungalow up to the bed in which the head of the family lay.

Immediately there was pandemonium, and a hurrying and scurrying about of all the family, anxious for the safety of the children. These were removed to safety, but father would not budge. He stayed in bed until the water subsided, as he had vowed he would.

This same gentleman used to cut wood where the Southern Hospital now stands. The site was known as Bodgers (sic) Mount, and it belonged to Mr. Thomas Chapman, in the days when the Park was a farm.

There was a time, too, within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, when the elderly and needy widows of the parish would go to church every Sunday to receive loaves and a two-shilling piece each. Later they were given a token which they took to the shop of the baker, then Mr. Munn, who delivered bread in a goat cart.

The Jubilee Procession.

When the day of the jubilee of King George V, and Queen Mary came round, as was right and proper, Mr. George Milliams had a place of honour in the procession organised at Darenth. On that same day he celebrated his eighty-second birthday, and accordingly a local bard broke into verse on the subject as follows:-

Full eighty two years I have lived in this part,
For 'twas here down in Darenth I first made a start,
I was born bred and christened, and lived all my life
In this very place where I took me a wife.

Of men in the parish, I'm oldest of all,
 And 'tis strange that my birthday on May 6 should fall,
 For this jubilee honours our king (George by name)
 And coincidence happens that mine is the same.
 To carry it further, with quite good intent,
 "George" also stands for His Grace, Duke of Kent.
 When my race has been run, and the time comes to halt,
 With this parish of Darenth I'll find not a fault:
 My life has been happy, and so full of zest,
 In such pleasant surroundings I hope to find rest.

He in whose honour these verses were composed carried a placard on which they were written in the jubilee procession.

Mr. Milliams endorses every word of the composition, and something vital in Darenth will pass away when this great veteran departs from the village. But he is not thinking of departing yet awhile.

He Had a Thousand Jobs.

If it may be seen that George Milliams tried his hand at many a trade in his time, what shall we say of George Cherry, aged 74, who lives at 6, Stanley Cottages? Mr. Cherry seriously makes the claim that he has been in upwards of a thousand distinct posts in his lifetime.

If he went to work as a lad of ten, we must assume that he had on an average a little over fifteen different jobs every year, more than one a month. Moreover, he tells us that he was employed at the cement factory at Swanscombe for thirteen or fourteen years, then under the control of J.B. White and brothers.

But when Mr. Cherry begins the story of his life, it soon becomes apparent that in making the claim he does, he is not romancing. He began as a boy of eight, "minding" birds from the fruit in summer and the corn in winter, and at the age of eleven he became shepherd boy. This was followed by a short spell on a farm, and then that life of which variety has indeed been the spice.

There are those in the village who say that at times George Cherry moved from one house to another, and before he had unloaded his belongings, moved on yet again. At all events, he moved eighteen times in twenty-eight years, and at one time lived on three different farms in eight months.

One sympathises with Mrs. Cherry, mother of ten children. She never knew when her husband might return from work with the news that they were to begin their travels once more. And moving to the Cherrys was something of an undertaking, seeing that they carried the whole operation themselves.

From one job to another with bewildering rapidity Mr. George Cherry progressed. He has been bricklayers labourer, carpenter, plasterer, painter, bricklayer, stoker, fitters labourer, engineers labourer, agricultural labourer, fruit cultivator, fruit packer, fruit carter. He has tried his hand at sowing; stacking, thatching, ploughing, mowing, reaping and hoeing-and this does not by any means exhaust the list.

He worked in the cement factory at a wage of 4 1/2d. an hour, and here without a doubt was his hardest toil. He has known the time when 90 tons of cement were loaded into a barge by hand in a day, by the end of which blood was running down his back from raw wounds caused by "humping" the ponderous sacks.

"It was real hard work in those days, all pick and shovel. None of this standing by and watching the wheels go round," he told me.

For many years he was a "scurfer" at the factory, which means that he was daily on the premises awaiting the call to such work as might be assigned to him. Consequently it was nothing for him to have as many as ten different jobs in the course of a week, which partly explains the number he claims to have had in his lifetime.

Mr. Cherry Is Baffled.

Inevitably such a wandering spirit must have possessed remarkable versatility. It is George Cherry's boast that he required to see how a certain task was done once only and he knew how to do it. Only once in his life

did he appear to be defeated, and that was when his daughter asked him to raise the handlebars of her bicycle.

After puzzling over this problem for several hours, he at length decided to “sleep on it.” On awaking in the middle of the night the solution came to him. He rose then and there, and by candlelight carried out the operation satisfactorily.

Mr. Cherry also claims that he has never once had fault found with him by an employer. He was independent to a degree, and though at times this caused a certain amount of hardship to his family as well as to himself, he always reserved the right to a perfect freedom of action, and looked every man in the face as his equal.

His desire for knowledge has been insatiable. Many of his jobs he has taken up purely in order to discover “how it’s done.” For instance, on one occasion he took a position in a tanyard, and having learned all there was to know about the process of tanning leather, left it after six weeks.

“But when I was doing a job, I always had my mind on it,” he declares. “I was never doing one job with my mind on another.”

“Rare Doings on the Green.”

Despite his extensive wanderings he has never moved far from Darenth, which he well remembers as a child when he used to come to the village from his birthplace, neighbouring Betsham. He can recall the “rare doings down at the green” on a Good Friday, with dancing and fiddling in the parlours of the Whit Hart and the Ship, and on the green itself a fair.

Particularly he remembers the coconut shies, very different from their modern successors. The coconuts then projected from baskets of woven rushes, and the object of the “shier” was to knock them from their pedestals into the baskets by means of short sticks.

Mr. Cherry also remembers the days when there was a gypsy encampment “on the Green,” and says that to him the nomadic band seemed a happy company, the members of which were very loyal one to another. Fortune-tellers were legion among them, and people used to come from the surrounding villages to consult them. As for the children, they were an abiding nuisance, having been schooled by their parents in the art of begging, principally for tobacco.

Death of the Gipsy Queen.

The “Queen of the Gipsies” in those days, says George Cherry, was the renowned Gipsy Lee, a “nice kind soul.” He walked a mile and a half to see her funeral, and a grand procession it was, with two and four-in-hands, draped coaches, and behind the whole gipsy tribe in donkey carts and such other vehicles as were at their command.

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Another who has pleasant memories of happy times “on the Green” is Mrs. G.H.Cleaver, who was born in Darenth parish, as was her father before her, but who now lives at 14, Ingram Road, Dartford.

Mrs. Cleaver told me of the lively celebration, which annually closed the hop-picking season-for in her younger days the Green was surrounded by hop-gardens. The pole-pullers, men whose task it was to pull up the poles and deposit them on the bins, when the women would pick the hops from them, were decorated with flowers, and old people of the village were put in the bins and pelted with hops. To the one who helped them out they owed a fine.

Mrs. Cleaver particularly remembers how on one occasion old Granny Baker, a well known figure with her snuff box, on being served in this manner muttered imprecations so lugubrious as to strike fear into the heart of the young child. But then, all the children were half inclined to believe that Granny Baker was a witch.

Memories of the Ploughing Match.

Mrs. Cleaver likewise has memories of the ploughing match, which every year was held, at Speedgate Farm, a place of resort on the great day from miles around. The horses were a magnificent sight, perfectly groomed

and with harness brightly burnished, while the ploughman who drove the straightest furrow received the award of a blue jersey.

St. Luke's was a tin shed with its tiny bell, known as the "sheep bell," in the days when Mrs. Cleaver attended school there. Scholars in those days paid 2d. a week towards the cost of their education, and Mrs. Cleaver's brother Tom occasionally spent his 2d., with dire consequences.

Father Cleaver invariably found out when there had been any misbehaviour on the part of one of his fifteen children, and his explanation was that a "little bird" was his informant. Lo and behold, one fine day young Tom Cleaver and his sister were to be found in the fields throwing stones at the birds, with the purpose of killing the one who caused retribution to fall upon them!

It was from Mrs. Cleaver that I learned of the fire which about seven years ago destroyed the row of fine old thatched and timbered cottages, with red-brick floors, hundreds of years old, which stood just behind the Forge, and belonged to Miss Treadwell.

A Terrible Fire.

The inhabitants of the cottages were cooking their Sunday dinner when the fire broke out, as the result of a spark from a chimney setting light to the thatch. The straw of this burned up into a blaze in the twinkling of an eye, and nothing that fire brigades could do was able to save this little gem of rural England from annihilation.

Fortunately all the cottagers escaped with their lives and most of their belongings, and were temporarily accommodated in sheds and barns. The fire caused great excitement in the parish at the time, and the loss of those cottages is still mourned by many.

* * * *

The Boy Scout Movement.

Mrs. Cleaver's son, Mr. Herbert Cleaver, is Scoutmaster of the 1st. Darenth Troop of Boy Scouts, an outline of the history of which he gave to me. He told me that the troop was founded in 1913 by Miss Fleet of Darenth Grange, who has been intimately associated with it ever since.

The troop has had a number of Scoutmasters in its time, including Messrs. Stanley Price, L Judge, W.J.C.Grout (the school master), H.C.Roberts and J Spice. Mr. Cleaver took charge five years ago. He has been a member of the troop for 12 years.

Darenth Scouts may not be strong in numbers, but they are so in enthusiasm. At one time they boasted a Rover Crew, known as the Caledon Rovers, since they were presented with a flag from H.M.S.Caledon. This passed out of existence, but there is a movement afoot to revive it. At one time also there was a very fine drum and fife band.

Mr. Cleaver is assisted by assistant Scoutmasters John Munn and Clifford Logan. Mr. A.M.Fleet is the chairman. A week before Christmas the troop celebrated its silver jubilee-although in actual fact it ceased to exist for a short time at the end of the War (WW1)-by marching from the Sunday school to the Grange in a torch-light procession.

A bouquet was presented to Miss Fleet in recognition of what she had done for the troop in the 25 years of its existence, and simultaneously a rocket was fired. Mr. Cleaver informed me that Miss Fleet was to give a party to the troop at the end of January.

Darenth Scouts always make a long trek for their annual summer camp. In recent years they have visited Yarmouth, Weymouth, Skegness, and this year contemplate visiting Wales. Their scoutmaster was for a time acting secretary of the Dartford Association.

The British Legion.

Darenth has a flourishing branch of the British Legion, founded in 1922 as a sub-branch of Dartford, and which entered into independent existence on February 2, 1923. The hon. secretary is Mr. F.A.Bower, of 42, Watchgate, who assumed his present office in 1937.

He told me that Mr. A.M.Fleet has been president of the branch since its foundation, and that the vice-presidents are Colonel the Hon. Angus McDonnell, C.M.G., Canon H.T.Powell, Major J.K.C.Lang, Mr. J.Langlands and Mr. E.Moore; the hon. chaplain the Rev.E.G.Pratt, the chairman Mr. E.Coller the vice-chairman Mr. A.Mulliner, and the hon. treasurer Mr.E.Cox.

The inaugural meeting of the branch was held at the Fox and Hounds, Lanes End, when the officers elected were: Chairman, Mr.A.Sanger; vice-chairman, Mr.W.H.Connor; hon. secretary and treasurer, Mr.E.J.Roberts. By the time the branch became independent it could boast 100 members, ample evidence of local enthusiasm. A women's section formed in 1923, with Miss Fleet as first chairman, unfortunately had but a brief existence.

At first the men met in the Fox and Hounds, then at the Sunday school. Then came the day when the mantle factory of Messrs Curtis and Harvey came up for sale. Mr.Fleet purchased therefrom a hut, now the hut, which he permitted the branch to rent from him. These headquarters were officially opened on August 23, 1924, by Brig. General Cox, C.B., C.I.E., chairman of the Kent Council of the British Legion.

Fate, however, proved unkind, and owing to financial difficulties the Darenth legionnaires were eventually forced to restore the hut to Mr.Fleet. At the present time they still have the privilege of using it, a privilege shared with other organisations in the parish.

Membership has always stood at a fairly high level-at present it totals about 85-and history points to the foundation of sub-branches at Bean and Longfield. The branch was faithfully served by Mr. E.J.Roberts for 11 years as secretary, who upon his retirement from the office was presented with a silver watch by his fellow members. Mr. C.H.Randall succeeded him for three years.

As is the case with most Legion branches, that of Darenth has exerted a beneficent influence upon the parish in a number of ways. Notably, every year at Christmas members hold a collection in the village to provide parcels to distribute to old-age pensioners and the unemployed. The peak was reached two years ago when 56 parcels were distributed at a cost of 5s. each.

The branch has the care of the original and effective War Memorial without the gate of St.Margaret's, which it inaugurated, and plays the major role in the parish observance of Armistice Day. Miss Nixon, Matron of the Park [Hospital], organises the sale of poppies within the precincts thereof.

The Cottage Gardeners.

Hard by the home of Mr. Bower, whose son, Peter sang his first solo in the choir at St.Margarets on Christmas Day, ???? Mr.Waller hon. secretary of the Darenth and district Cottage Gardeners and allotment holders association, for the past 12 years.

I was greatly interested in this body, the like of which I had not then encountered in the villages, and I learned from Mr.Waller that next to the cricket club it is the organisation longest established in Darenth.

For 29 years the association has been in existence, and there was a time when such entertainment as the parish enjoyed was provided solely by the cottage gardeners. Of course with the arising of other organisations their monopoly of whist drives, dances and competitions has long since passed away, but they yet hold a time-honoured place in the regard of their fellow villagers.

The association was founded with the purpose of encouraging interest in gardening and allotment cultivation. The principal event of the year is the annual show, held always in the grounds of the Grange, at the invitation of Mr.Fleet, president from the beginning.

Considering the size of the parish, this show is remarkably fine. There are generally as many as five hundred entries in the various classes of fruit and vegetables, and keen competition for the money prizes. The general standard down the years has been uniformly high. Judges are provided by the Kent Education Committee.

Competitions in fruit and vegetables are if anything almost overshadowed by the baby show, which is an indispensable feature of the show. Any baby in the parish may be entered for this, with the result that is the Mecca of the mothers of Darenth, while the fathers are among the produce.

The Day of Days.

What is more, a funfair with round-abouts and sideshows, is also provided by the organisers of a function which may still be said to provide the day of days for the majority of villagers. Grass-track racing by the

Bexley Motor-Cycle Club, local fire brigade competitions, performances by Dr. Barnardo's and other bands—these in years past have been attractions that have brought the village flocking to the Grange meadow for the Cottage Gardeners' show.

Inevitably the association must possess a keen body of workers, and on this point Mr. Waller was emphatic. He mentioned to me the names of Mr. H.C.Roper and Mr. S.S.Morley, both of whom were hard working pioneers, while Mr.E.J.Coates stands out as he who introduced the cultivation of sweet peas to Darenth and was responsible for the institution of the annual sweet pea show which flourished for a number of years.

A number of members of the Cottage Gardeners Association have shewn with success elsewhere, notably Mr.S.Munn, whose sweet peas at one time were to be seen at the Chelsea Flower Show. At present the association rejoices in 50 enthusiastic members, including several professional gardeners.

These pay a subscription of 2s.6d. a year, while cottagers are asked to contribute 1s. 6d. Although the show of last year was the first to pay for itself for nine or ten years, the association's finances are in a healthy condition. When I called upon Mr.Waller he had just returned from Chatham, where he and fellow-officers had escorted a party of 253 village children to a pantomime.

"In other years we've always given a party to all the children of Darenth," he told me. "But the village is growing so rapidly that this year we found there was no hall to hold them all, and so we went to a panto instead."

Mr. Waller's predecessors as hon. secretary have been Mr. W.Edwards and Mr. Ball (the first). His mother is Mrs. Waller, who has lived in Darenth parish all her life, and who now resides in a cottage at Lanes End, almost opposite the Fox and Hounds.

Tommy Gordon's Donkeys.

It was she who told me of the fair, which in her young days was held annually opposite the Chequers, and of old Tommy Gordon and his donkeys and pony chaise.

The donkeys were the delight of the young people, while the elders enjoyed "sport" with the pony. The paper-makers employed at the old Darenth Paper Mill, then owned by T.H.Saunders, would hire Tommy's pony and trap for a "penny ride." Off they would bowl round the nearest corner, and once out of sight would head far away, returning only at nightfall.

Mrs. Waller can recall the days when the gipsies used to come to her mother for succour when their children were ill, while her memories of War time include those of when a bomb exploded near the Southern Hospital, making a hole fifteen feet wide, and when several "duds" fell "on the green."

The "Great Flood" is also green in her memory. She remembers seeing water sixteen feet deep rushing down Wood Lane during the terrible thunderstorm in which the church steeple was struck by lightning, and pouring right through the Chequers, in which in those days there was a right-of-way.

Not for Sale!

At this inn, of great antiquity, I was shewn by the landlord, Mr. L.Blew, the splendid oak panelling in the saloon bar. It is almost certain that this was brought from St.Margarets perhaps centuries ago. Many come from all parts to feast their eyes upon it, and many have been the offers-substantial offers- to buy it. But the oak panelling of the Chequers Inn is not for Sale.

Mr. Blew further told me that in the upstairs rooms are to be seen massive, uncut oak beams, and that the cottage adjoining the present premises, which stands to this day, was originally the Inn.

But a few paces from the Chequers is the Mill such as are its neighbours, where paper was made until a little over eight years ago. Then the business was amalgamated with that of another mill, and the building at Darenth became derelict. So it stood for a space, although machinery for a canning factory was installed, but never used.

Then, a few years ago, it was taken over by the firm of W.A.Parrack, fabric printers and heraldic artists, the present owners. In Darenth Mill today, flags of all nations are printed. It is one of the few such factories in the country.

Flags for all Nations.

Much of the printing done there is for the British Government, but there is scarcely one among the known nations whose flag (or a portion thereof) has not at some time been printed at Darenth. As for unknown nations-who has heard of Trengganu, Koweit, Perlis, Qatar, Bahrein? The flags of these independent states are printed at the mill.

Here, moreover, is one spot in the world where the Swastika of Germany and the Hammer and Sickle of the Soviets fly side by side without convulsing Europe. I was told that many swastikas printed in our little village may well eventually fly in honour of Hitler, though quite a number of them find their way to German ships which call at British ports.

Also printed at Darenth are numerous pennants and banners used for advertising purposes by large firms, such as Mobiloil, Shell, Kodak and Wall of the ice cream. Church and poster banners likewise find their way to the mill, where are printed also the banners of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides and every British Legion flag.

I was enabled to see something of the process of printing, and learned that the artist's design is the first copied by Mr.W.J.Parrack, father of Mr.W.A.Parrack, and founder of the business, and from this a pattern is taken.

This is then transferred to screens, one screen for each colour, with a maximum of half-a-dozen. The screens are then clamped on to the material simultaneously, and ordinary dye is applied by hand pressure. At present the whole process is carried out by hand. The fabric is then steamed, and afterwards placed over a revolving jenny, which is driven by a motor, and which causes the removal of all surplus dye.

For washing, the water of the mill stream is used, and I was told that before the apparatus could be made workable the mill-head had to be cleared of the weeds that clogged it.

At the time at which I called, the staff at the mill, including several Darenth lads and girls were at work upon the printing of flags of the United States and Canada, for which there was already a great demand in view of the visit of their Majesties the King and Queen to America.

The Church of St.Margaret.

The Vicarage is little more than a stone's throw from the mill. The Vicar, the Rev. E.G.Pratt, B.D., outlined to me the history of the very remarkable Church of St.Margaret, one of the oldest in the land.

There is a mention of a church at Darenth in a grant of the year 940. The West and North walls of the nave are undoubtedly Saxon. The choir and presbytery are Norman, having been added during the 12th. century, while one of the most precious possessions is the beautiful Norman font with its unfinished reliefs.

The existing nave, aisles and the lancet windows belong to the Early English period, as does the tower, which is surmounted by a plain shingle broach spire of typical Kentish type. There have been several later additions and alterations.

There are some ancient bells, some interesting plate, the gift of Edmund Davenport in the year 1670, and the registers date from 1678. A list of Vicars from the year 1197 appears in Fieldings "Records of Rochester."

The Women's Institute.

From Mrs.Pratt I learned that Darenth possesses a very active Women's Institute, founded in 1933 by Mrs.Howland, the wife of Mr.Pratt,s predecessor, and there seems little doubt that the efforts of the present Vicar's wife, acting secretary, are to a large extent responsible for the achievements of this Institute to date.

It is Mrs.Pratt who has trained the choir and percussion band, of which members are justly proud, while she also produces the dramatic performances that are given from time to time. At the competitions and exhibitions of the National federation of Women's Institutes, the Darenth branch has on occasion won honours in singing, and a few awards in the produce section.

The present strength is 53, meetings are held monthly in the Hut, and these normally take the form of

lectures and demonstrations. This year £11 has been collected for the Cancer Campaign. Those who share the honours of organisation with Mrs.Pratt, are Mrs.J.Langlands, vice-president, an untiring worker, and Mrs.E.Marshall, the hon. treasurer, while Mrs.G.Chancellor and Mrs.F.Barker have in their turn filled the responsible role of secretary.

Miss Fleet has been president and chairman since the foundation.

The Girls' Friendly Society.

In 1934 Mrs.Pratt was instrumental in founding a branch of the Girls' Friendly Society, attached to St.Margarets, which has had a phenomenally successful career. For each year since its foundation the candidates have won the Diocesan Cup for gaining the highest number of points of all the branches in the Diocese of Rochester in the competitions.

The activities of the branch include handicrafts, country dancing, and keep fit classes. Those associated with Mrs.Pratt in the conduct of it are Mrs.E.Marshall, Mrs.K.Earl, Miss B.Solomon, Mrs.F.Barker, Mrs.T.Wingrove and Mrs.D.Grace.

When I met Mrs.Pratt she told me that the branch was preparing for the Diocesan competitions of this year, to be held in April, while she added with a smile that she was hopeful that her girls would repeat the success of previous years.

Church Army Activities.

Visiting the vicar at the same time as myself was Captain T.Henry of 7 Stanley Cottages, who since September 1937, has supervised the activities of the Church Army in the parish. The headquarters of the Army are at St.Lukes, Green Street Green, and the station has been in existence there since 1933.

Captain Henry's predecessors have been, Captain G.Roberts and Captain A.Hutchins. From the present officer-in-charge I learned that the activities of a Church Army captain consists among others of visiting, conducting services, including preaching, and distributing the "Church Army Gazette," which finds its way into between 50 and 60 Darenth homes.

Captain Henry, in conjunction with Mr.T.Pavelin, supervises the activities of the Boys Club, which was founded in 1936, and meets in the Sunday school every Friday evening. These activities include football and cricket and indoor games. The club at present is about 60 strong.

The Judges of the Council.

Mr.L.U.Judge, of Pyecroft, it was who outlined to me the history of Darenth Parish Council, one of the oldest in the district. No one was better equipped to do so, for a Judge has been Parish Clerk from the very commencement until today.

The Council came into existence in 1894, and the first Clerk was Mr.W.J.Judge, Mr.Judge's uncle. He held the office for two years only, and then was succeeded by Mr.Judge's father, Mr.Urban Judge.

From Minute books still in the possession of the present Clerk, I learned that on December 4th, 1894, a Parish Meeting for the election of Councillors was held at the school.

Forty seven electors were present, and from among these the following were elected to the first Council: Messers. W.A.Conford, Percy Hassell, E.J.Summers, J.N.Burtenshaw, S.S.Morley, R.Robb, R.Butler, T.Mortley, A.Millbourne, J.R.Ward and the Rev. H.Bingham Stevens.

The first meeting proper was held on December 14 of the same year, and the Rev. H.Bingham Stevens (as he then was) was elected into the chair, with Mr.Conford as his Vice Chairman.

It is interesting to see what were the matters that immediately concerned the fledgling Council. From the old minute book, we read that "It was proposed by the Rev. H.B.Stevens and seconded by Mr.A Millbourne that the recent discoveries of the Roman Villa on land in the occupation of Mr.J.W.Burtenshaw in this parish be recorded in the minutes."

The Clerk was also deputed to make inquiries regarding the project of Messers. Pigou, Wilks and Co. to

manufacture cordite in the vicinity-with a view to opposing the application for a licence!

At first, Mr.Judge informed me, a new Council was elected yearly, later every three years. The only exception to this rule occurred during the War, when the election that fell due in 1916 was postponed by Government order.

Beating the Bounds.

The beating of the bounds was carried out several times under the old Overseers, but the ceremony has not been performed since 1932. The Council has taken the lead in the organisation of Coronation of King Edward VIII., when (again according to the minute book), "Mr.Conford proposed that a 1d. rate be made to cover the expenses-which Mr.Treadwell seconded; carried unanimously."

Mr.Urban Judge gave his loyal service to Darenth Council from 1896 to 1928. It is hardly surprising that for a successor the Councillors sought no further than the son of such a father. And so for the past eleven years Mr.L.U.Judge has been Clerk to this, as he is also today to the parishes of Horton Kirby and Eynsford.

Of the Councillors, those whose records of service are likewise impressive include Canon Stevens, who resigned in 1911; Canon H.T.Powell, who was elected in 1913, and served until 1932; and Mr.A.M.Fleet and Mr.J.T.Tristram.

Also worthy to be mentioned is Mr.Harry Morgan, who for the past ten or eleven years has regularly supported the parish Council meeting and, not himself a Councillor, is almost invariably the only layman to be present-as he may be, though he may not take part in discussion. The present Chairman is Mr.C.Daniel, and the Vice-Chairman Mr.E.Coller.

There can scarcely be an organisation in the village with which neither Mr.A.M.Fleet nor Miss Florence Fleet is connected. This is hardly surprising when one considers that these two benefactors to Darenth have lived at the Grange for many years, and that their ancestors lived there before them.

When I called at his mansion set on the hill, Mr.Fleet told me that his family had lived at Darenth for 140 years, and that in his great grandfathers day there were but 200 people in the parish. Then the Vicar was non-resident, and one service only was held on a Sunday, while the parishes of Wilmington and Darenth were one.

The Smuggler's Way.

In the days of that same great grandfather a bridle-way ran through the grounds of the Grange, which followed the track of an old Roman road, and was known as the Pack Way. Mr.Fleet's ancestor would tell of how the family used to hear smugglers galloping up this track from their hiding-place in Kingsdown Woods, their pack-horses laden with brandy-skins. They went on their way unmolested, for the village Patrol, the forerunner of the police force, dared not oppose them.

In ancient times a Roman camp stood on the site of the Grange, which no doubt explains the existence of the Roman Villa nearby. Tiles from this Villa, Mr.Fleet informed me have been incorporated in the structure of the church, of which the owner of the Grange is a warden.

The Nursing Association.

From Miss fleet I obtained information regarding the Mothers Union and the Longfield, Hartley, Darenth and district Nursing Association. The Union, I learned, was instituted by Mrs.Bingham Stevens, wife of Canon Bingham Stevens, a former Vicar of Darenth, and is still flourishing. Miss Fleet is the enrolling member and president, and Mrs.Langlands the chairman.

The Nursing Association is long-established. It began as the Longfield Association only, but later Darenth felt the need of a nurse, and the two districts came under unified control. Hartley Village is also associated.

Today there are two nurses. Nurse Pile is stationed at Green Street Green, nurse Amos at Longfield. The president is Miss Fleet, the hon. secretary Mrs.Lancashire, of Park View, Stoney Corner, and the hon.

treasurer Mrs.Gostelow, of Sutton-at-Hone.

The committee members include Mrs.Leeves (Longfield), Mrs.Crouch (Fawkham), Mrs.Robson (Hartley), Mrs.H.Phillips (Darenth), Mrs.Marshall (Lanes End), Mrs.Spalding (South Darenth), Mrs.Keeble (Green Street Green), Mrs.Hawkins (Bean), Mrs.Adams and Mr.W.Wright (Representative of the Kent County Council).

From a copy of the rules lent me by Miss Fleet outlined the information that the nurses work under the committee of the association and are under the supervision of the superintendent of the Kent County Nursing Association, and that confinements have the first claim upon a nurses time. : That an annual subscription of 5s. covers both parents and children under the age of 16; that non-members may obtain the services of the nurse at 1s. per visit or 3s. 6d. per week; and that all necessitous cases are nursed free of charge.

This year Darenth Sunday school building achieves its centenary, but the event is not likely to be signalled by celebrations, Canon H.Tudor Powell, Vicar of Darenth for 21 years (from 1911 to 1932), informed me.

The Sunday School Table.

Canon Powell added that the Sunday School was almost certainly erected by the National Society for the Education of the Young in the Principles of the Church of England, and that from the day of its foundation dates the old table with the knot-hole, at which generations of children have sat.

The day school, I learned, has been under the control of Mr.W.J.Grout for well over a decade. Today it is a junior mixed school, the senior boys and girls proceeding to the central schools at Dartford. Canon Powell is himself chairman of the managers, while his colleagues Mr. And Miss Fleet and Mr.T.C.Tristram are appointed by the Kent Education Committee, and Mr.W.A.Waller and Mrs.Marshall by the Parish Council.

From Canon Powell I learned two interesting facts, that the Church was formerly in the gift of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but was exchanged with the Dean and Chapter of Rochester for Lambeth; and that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners are the lords of the manor of Darenth.

A Visit to Clock House.

When I called upon Colonel the Hon. Angus McDonnell at the sturdy Clock House, I found him busy in his workshop. He laid aside his hammer and chisel for a brief space in order to tell me of the legend concerning his ancient name.

According to this there is a secret passage from the Clock House to the Ship. The inn it is believed, was at one time a Court House, and the passage is supposed to have been used for conducting prisoners thence to the dungeons.

Certainly there are two round chambers in the garden of the Colonel's home which bear the date 1647, and have every appearance of being dungeons, while at the Ship is to be seen a room with the Royal Arms over the fireplace. Furthermore, a sheriff of the County, by name Davenport, was at one time owner of Clock House. But as yet no secret passage has been discovered, and there are some who cast doubt upon the authenticity of the dungeons.

The house is undoubtedly very old. Two of its most distinctive features are the oak panelling in one of the bedrooms, the walls of which are stencilled in three places, and the Elizabethan arches behind the present fireplaces.

“Rats’ Castle.”

Another interesting legend of Darenth parish concerns Rats’ Castle. I heard so much concerning this house in the village that I determined to visit it, to discover the origin of its extraordinary name.

At the “Castle” I met Miss Treadwell, student of history and preserver of ancient buildings, who lives alone there with her dog and cat, and learned how with loving care she restored her three-hundred-year-old home in a manner which retains the original picturesqueness and charm to perfection.

In this house of splendid beams, in which its owner has accumulated a fascinating collection of treasures

and curios, at one time lived the parish rat-catcher, in the days when the rat-catcher with his terriers and ferrets was a familiar sight in and indispensable amenity of every village.

This rat-catcher had three pretty daughters, and they all married well. At least, that is how the story goes, and Miss Treadwell accepting it as truth, has named her abode Rat's Castle. In confirmation of which Mrs.G.H.Cleaver gives the name of the rat-catcher as Mr. Brown, and says that she remembers as a child seeing dead rats hanging by their tails from a line in his garden.

On the other hand "Sharper" Ludlow declares that Mr.Brown was never a rat-catcher in his life. He says that the gentleman in one of the two cottages of which the "Castle" originally consisted, and that in the other resided a Mr.Carroll.

Now Mr.Brown had many children, but Mr.Brown's offspring at times proved very annoying to Mr.Carroll, who would remark to his fellow-villagers. "They run about like rats, those children." And so the house was dubbed Rat's Castle.

Which version is correct? Who can tell? Here is a problem for the ancients to puzzle over during the dark evenings-as an alternative to inventing nicknames.

Signed. Norris Willatt.

Note: Text in brackets [] are input by Barry M Edwards.