

LOCAL HISTORY NEWS  
being the News-sheet of the  
ESHER District Local History Society



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**To the members and friends  
of the Esher District Local History Society**

It is with real regret that I cannot be with you today on this very special occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> AGM of the Society. Unfortunately, my wife and I had planned a short holiday sometime before I became aware of the date of the meeting.

Fifty and not out! This is a very significant milestone in the history of the Society and one at which we can look back from with a great deal of pride and satisfaction as to what has been achieved.

When the Society was formed I was in my teens and interest in local history was still a bit of a niche area of interest limited to what some saw as a few crusty antiquarians. I don't think that this applied to the Esher district thanks to the pioneering foresight of Councillor Royston Pike and Local Librarian Derek Brown.

I was a real "boy" among the original committee members who had years of experience pursuing the history of their own particular "patches". In Cobham there was T.E.C. Walker and, in Molesey, Rowland Baker and Arthur Berry. George Greenwood was the historian for Hersham and Walton and Mr Mercer

covered Thames Ditton. Each of these men had already established for themselves a reputation for themselves in their amazing knowledge of the history of their areas.

Those were the days before computers and the internet when research meant hours of diligent research in county and local archive offices as well local enquiries of older local residents, some of who had memories going back to the end of the nineteenth century.

Derek Brown did so much by collecting old photos, paintings and drawings of the area which formed the basis of a wonderful collection in the new Esher District Library. If he and others had not actively pursued their collection of these items many of them would have been lost forever, perhaps consigned to the bonfire by their families after their deaths. Derek also instigated local history exhibitions at the various libraries around the district and held tea parties at which older residents could come and share their recollections of the past. All this was ground breaking stuff.

So today we look back with real affection and gratitude to those who started this Society and to those who have nobly succeeded them both in their work as historians and as members of the committee which have kept the Society going through good times and bad.

I was particularly pleased by the recent production of the Village Study guide to Esher produced by Jo Richards and her team. This was real ground-breaking work. Whereas in the past so much of the history of the Esher was limited to the past few centuries and the royal connections with Claremont, Jo and her team were able to show that there was life in Esher before Vanbrugh and the first Claremont!

May I conclude by thanking all those members of the Society, both past and present, who have worked so hard not only to keep the Society going but also to arrange wonderful lectures and, of course, produce our Newsletter which keeps us informed about all that is going on.

But a special vote of thanks must be given to Paul and Maureen Langton who have really been at the forefront of keeping the Society going over recent years. I understand that Paul wishes to stand down from his present responsibilities and that Terry Gale has kindly offered to step up to the challenge of helping to take the Society on into its next half century.

I wish you all a very happy 50<sup>th</sup> AGM and every success to those who will take the Society forward

*David Taylor*

At the 2018 AGM of the Society at Holy Trinity Church Hall, Claygate the following people were elected or confirmed as remaining in post:

- President ..... Dr David Taylor
- Vice Presidents ..... Miss Joan Harlow  
..... Dr Pamela Reading  
..... Mr Paul Langton
- Chairman ..... Terry Gale
- Vice Chairman ..... Janet Heskins
- Membership Secretary ..... Dr Veronica King
- Minutes Secretary ..... Pat Worthy
- Treasurer ..... Janet Heskins
- Website Manager ..... Terri Last

(Subsequently, Jon Moore agreed to become Research Officer of the Society.)

The new Committee would like to record their thanks to Paul and Maureen Langton for all their hard work and dedicated service to EDLHS over many years. Thanks also to Tim Sargent and Chris Harris who have retired from the Committee having given much service to the Society.

Following the business part of the AGM, Paul Langton then gave a talk entitled "A Postcard Extravaganza" with many illustrations on the hall projector. We saw spectacular images of the Men of Clerkenwell Station, London Fire Brigade in 1906, the Sydney Street Siege in Stepney 1911 and the Auto Carriers Works at Thames Ditton 1916 to name a few. Additionally examples of Bairnsfather and McGill humour were shown. There were tables of picture postcards to view afterwards showing the incredible variety of material that had been produced, particularly in the Edwardian era, whilst tea and coffee were taken.

A very warm welcome to all the new members who have joined us during 2018:

**Ian Amy, Nicky Amy, Mrs S Cochrane, Madge Cole, Marian Duffy, Simon Goodhugh, Barry Hall, Janet Heskins, Terri Last, Nicholas Lockstone, Di Pickover, Jon Moore, Dr Helen Goepel, Susan Riggs, Monica Smith, Stephen Stratton, Mrs H Strong, John Whitfield, Pauline Whitefield.**

Richard Jefferies, a prolific novelist and nature writer, published nearly 20 books despite living only to the age of 38. For a time, he lived locally in Ewell Road, Tolworth. In 1883 Jefferies published *Nature Near London* and within the first paragraph he writes

"The tiny white petals of the barren strawberry open under the April sunshine which, as yet unchecked by crowded foliage above, can reach the moist banks under the trees. It is then that the first stroll of the year should be taken in Claygate Lane"

Andrew Rossabi is the President of the Richard Jefferies Society and, earlier this year, published the first volume of a new study entitled:

**A PECULIARLY ENGLISH GENIUS,**

**OR A WILTSHIRE TAOIST:**

**A BIOGRAPHY OF RICHARD JEFFERIES**

**THE EARLY YEARS, 1848-1867**

We are delighted that Andrew will join us to talk about Richard Jefferies

**AT 2.30PM**

**SATURDAY 15TH SEPTEMBER**

**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH HALL, CLAYGATE**

*Copies of Andrew's book will be available at the talk and afterwards from*

*Jean Saunders, c/o The Old Mill, Mill Drive, Foulsham, Norfolk NR20 5RB*

**OTHER DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES**

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*All at 2.30pm at Holy Trinity Church Hall, Claygate, Surrey KT10 0JP*

The Profumo Affair, speaker Terry Johnson ~ Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2018

The War to End All Wars, speaker Andy Thompson ~ Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Christmas Meeting ~ Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018

(Short talks or pictures from Society Members. Please let Terry know if you are able to contribute items of local history or local genealogy.)

**By Terri Last**

Foley is a name long associated with Claygate, with the once considerable Foley estate long since divided and absorbed into the fabric of the village to be immortalised in Foley Road and the Foley Arms.

The Foley family, Barons of the Realm, neither began in Claygate and are unlikely to end in Claygate; their presence in the village spanning less than 50 years. The Foleys originated in Kidderminster, Worcester, where one Thomas Foley, a wealthy ironmaster, bought Witley Court. Between him and his descendants, over the next century, the house was extensively renovated and the estate landscaped.

It might be tempting to blame Thomas Henry, the fourth Baron Foley for the downfall of the family fortunes, as it was he, at the age of 29, and having been in control of the estate for a mere four years since his father's death, who had to sell Witley Court to cover extensive debts. But rumour – or gossip – has it that the entire family were prone to heavy gambling, so perhaps the 'odds' were stacked against him from the start.

It was a downfall from their point of view, but they were a very long way from the Workhouse. By 1851, Thomas was living with his family in an imposing town house on the affluent Grosvenor Street, Hanover Square. He had married Mary Charlotte Fitzalan Howard, daughter of the Duke of Norfolk in 1849. A Baron being several rungs down the aristocratic ladder from a Duke, Thomas had definitely made what was termed "an advantageous marriage"!

In 1861, the family are at the same address, with Thomas having the title "Lord Foley, Captain of the Gentlemen at Arms" – leader of the 40 men who attend the sovereign on state occasions. By now, Thomas and Mary have two children, Henry Thomas and Fitzalan John Charles and sixteen servants!

Thomas died in Paris in 1869 and the title, fifth Baron Foley passed to his eldest son, Henry Thomas, who was just 19 at the time. Three years later, Henry was in possession of more than 100 acres of land in Claygate, along with various buildings including the iconic Ruxley Lodge. In 1881 he is still living in Grosvenor Street with with his widowed mother, brother and all those servants. As he was a Captain in the Derbyshire Yeoman Cavalry and a JP, possibly work commitments kept him away from Claygate.

Sometime between 1881 and 1891, Henry sets up home in Ruxley Lodge, calling himself Peer of the Realm. He marries in 1899, at the age of 49, to Evelyn Vaughn Radford, who was 25 years his junior. When Henry died childless in 1905, the estate and title passed to his brother Fitzalan John Charles Foley, 6th Baron and Honorable Major in 3rd Battalion Derbyshire Regiment, who wasn't far away at Barwell Court. From the mid-1880's, the Foley brothers had begun to give away or sell off parts of the estate, Henry in a small way, Fitzalan bold enough to allot several acres for the building of 258 small villas, which turned out to be considerably fewer large villas. By the end of the century, the Foley presence in Claygate was on the decline.

Fitzalan died in 1918 at Ruxley Lodge. Unmarried and childless, the title passed to his first cousin once removed, 20 year old Gerald Henry Foley who, within a year, had auctioned off Ruxley Lodge. Ten years later, almost all Foley holdings in Claygate had been sold. One building, in Common Road, originally provided by Henry Thomas Foley in 1887, and which had been used variously for village activities, such as a workshop and various clubs, was donated to the villagers for their continued enjoyment.

So the Foleys were gone from Claygate, their legacy being a name and a flourishing village.

*Claygate Meccano Club, which was held in The Institute built by Lord Foley, in 1920*



FISH PONDS ON CLAYGATE COMMON

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**by Jo Richards**

Permission has been granted to Claygate husbandmen Robert Seamer and George Fielder to 'make or confine the two ponds or watery places for cattell... for ffish ponds'. In 1697 the Bailiffs and Freemen of Kingston, whose manor included most of Claygate's waste (unenclosed land), granted a 21-year lease on the estimated 2½ acres needed. Exceptions to the arrangement were that 'all persons in the Comon to water their cattell in said ponds as usuall' and that the Bailiffs reserve 'the bodies and topps of all the trees now standing growing or being... about or near said ponds'.

At that time Claygate's wastes of common and green straggled between Slough Farm in the north, Cobham in the south, Vale Road and Horrington, west, and Ruxley Farm, east. Small parcels of land within had been enclosed piecemeal over many centuries but in 1808 Kingston began proceedings for widespread enclosure by Parliamentary Act. Present-day Claygate Common escaped only because the land was outside Kingston manor, belonging in fact to Moulsey. The final Kingston Inclosure Maps of 1838 show the two ponds surrounded by newly allocated plots.

So where were these watery places. The first, Wall Rithe Pond, meaning the well or spring of the Rythe, was a boundary marker separating Thames Ditton and Cobham parishes now just south of the A3 near Holroyd Road. The second, New Pond, was by Common Road; the Alma public house later built on its west bank, the east bank can still be seen from Glenavon Close.

Terms for making the fish ponds were quite specific. The husbandmen were required to 'make or confine the... two severall ffish ponds at their own costs dig deep and scoure and rake and carry away the soils therof comeing and stok the same ponds with such kinds of ffishes as they shall please and the ffishes there being and breeding from time to time to take and have and dispose of to their own use and benefit with libertie also to plant and sell

Willows or any other young trees in about or neere... paying five brace of good live and well fedd Carps of sixteen inches in length Monday Whitson at the Guildhall for the bailiffs.'

*References*

Kingston History Centre, Counterpart Lease KC1/2/26

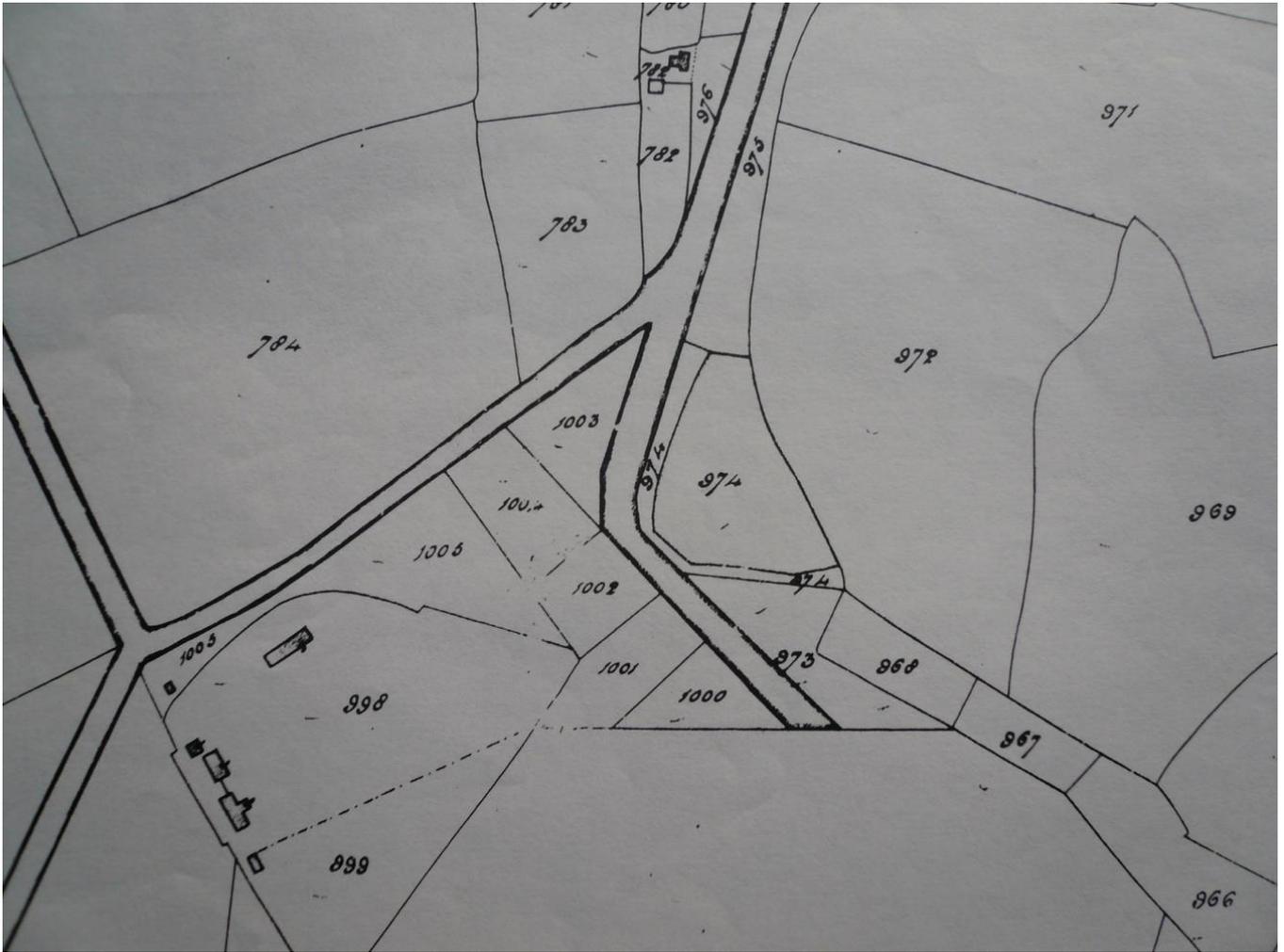
Surrey History Centre, Kingston Inclosure Map QS6/4/41



*Glenavon Close 2018 showing remnant of bank from earlier pond.*

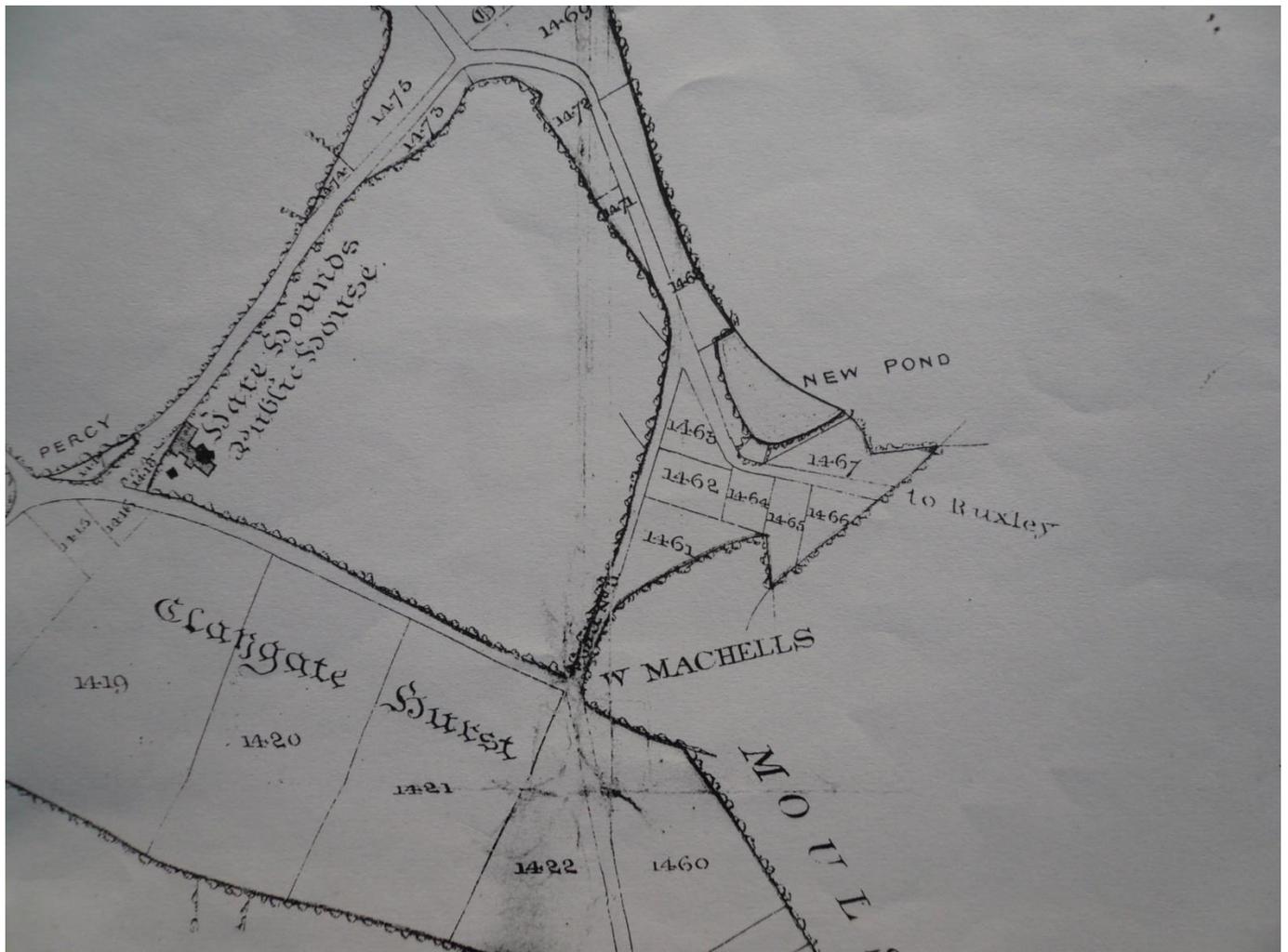
*Thames Ditton Tithe Map by Thomas Crawter of Cobham, 1843.*

*Plot 974 shows New Pond, Common Road, Claygate as being allotted to William Speer.*



*Claygate Common Inclosure Map 1838 showing the site of New Pond*

*(from Inclosure Award Maps for the manors of Kingston Upon Thames by Thomas Crawter of Cobham, dated 24<sup>th</sup> December 1838, courtesy of Surrey History Centre).*



## CURRENT RESEARCH INTERESTS OF MEMBERS

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Veronica King: Esher Old Church

Jo Richards: Origins of Claygate and Arbrook (from late Saxon estates through medieval manors to the early modern period).

Jon Moore: Esher Rifle Range at West End (especially photos).

Pat Worthy and Terry Gale: Educational records.

Keith Evetts: The story of the Speers and the Sandys (especially Hannibal Speer, born Sandys).

Janet Heskins: Surbiton Common (one of the local areas of common land which were used for building following the 1808-1838 enclosure act, also the site of one of the last skirmishes of the Civil War).

*Please let Terry know if you have feedback or additional information on any articles in the magazine or if you are currently involved with any local research.*

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THE DUCKITT EXPEDITION:  
ESHER'S CONTRIBUTION TO AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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**By Dr Veronica King**

The tomb of William Duckitt (d1801) in St George's Churchyard, Esher, also commemorates his son William who died at the Cape of Good Hope, *'to which Settlement he was sent with a large establishment by George the Third to introduce his Father's system and implements of Agriculture.'*

William Duckitt senior was born on the Isle of Wight but as a youngster was employed by the Duke of Newcastle in the garden at Claremont where he started his crop experiments and designed his first implements. He married Elizabeth Isles in Esher in 1763 and their second son William was born in 1765. The family moved to Weylands farm, then owned by Frances Pelham of Esher Place. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century farmhouse still survives across the River Mole from Waynelete Tower. There, William snr. designed many agricultural implements, winning a silver cup for his drill plough, and many prominent farmers visited him, including George III - 'Farmer George'. The youngest son, John, became gamekeeper at Esher Place and later managed the Estate and model farm at Woburn for the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Bedford. John succeeded his father at the farm of Sandown.

In the meantime William jnr. was employed at the Treasurer-General's office in London and had married Mary Whitbread, of the brewery family. He was selected to introduce his father's modern farming methods to the Cape, three years after the British occupied it in 1796. The authorities realized that the Boer farming methods were outdated and would be unable to feed the increasing population of Cape Town, the British garrison and those in the many naval and merchant ships.

The story of his expedition is recorded in his journal, which has never left the Cape.

A well-armed ship the *Wellesley*, was selected for the voyage but had to wait for a convoy as England was at war with France. Numerous other delays occurred, mainly because of the boorishness of the Captain. William wrote that he

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'refused to go further than the usual Rations allowed to troops which would by no means do for My Family...and no more than sufficient for three Months was sent'. He overcame the problem by obtaining from the War Office an order granting full allowances and also arranged for a supply of meat from Alder, a well established Esher butcher, at the cost of £15 6s 5d.



William Duckitt, SV/PROG (1768 - 1825) - Genealogy

The *Wellesley* loaded off Gravesend, leaving on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1800 with William's wife and two sons and a farming staff of ten, including Isaac Iles and five members of the Crowcher family, all from Esher. William, however, joined her at Portsmouth having travelled down alone from Esher by chaise for £4 14s 6d. Also on board were a Devon bull and two heifers from the Duke of Bedford's prize herd, seed, hop plants, fruit trees and machinery designed by his father. The plan to take sheep was abandoned at the last minute as a bureaucrat remembered an

Act of Parliament of 1788 which, to protect the English woollen industry, forbade the export of sheep.

Accompanied by East Indiamen and the Grand Fleet, the ship sailed to the Cape, surviving a skirmish with a French privateer. William wrote '*Had a very favourable but long passage and thank God the most part of the crew enjoyed a state of good health. Eleven of the Lascars died after the action but not one of the Europeans during the whole passage. Captain Gordon was very unpleasant to all the passengers til after the action, when he thought proper to change his conduct.*' They landed at the Cape on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1800.

William's first experiments in horticulture were not a success but having obtained a Meat Contract for both the Army and Naval personnel in 1801, he continued to farm at Klaver valley for many years. He had a blacksmith's shop for manufacturing ploughs to his fathers design, organised a racing stud and introduced vines to the area- producing wine and brandy by 1818.

William died in 1825 and his wife in 1843 but his descendants still occupy fourteen farms north of Cape Town. They have a house in Darling named Esher

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and a Waylands farm on the outskirts. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century William's granddaughter, Hildagonda, was responsible for introducing nemesia plants into Britain. She exported the nemesia seed to Sutton's Seed Merchants in England where they caused a sensation. She was also the instigator of the Christmas Chinchinchees flower export market from the Cape. Started by Hildagonda's brother over eighty years ago at the Waylands farm, the Wild Flower Fields are now an important tourist attraction. Along with the orchid export nursery across the road, the farm and its associated names from the Esher area are fascinating consequences of the experiments in Esher over two hundred years ago.

### CONTACTS FOR THE SOCIETY

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We are currently in the process of building a new website and will advise you when this is up and running.

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EDLHS is now affiliated to the Surrey Local

History Trust



Surrey History Trust is an independent charity that supports the work of Surrey Heritage in caring for the collections in [Surrey History Centre](#) and preserving and promoting the county's history