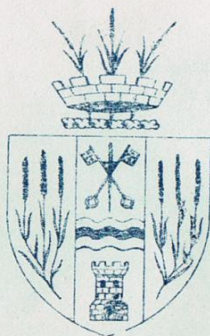


Mitcham County Grammar School for Boys



THE
GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'S
MAGAZINE

Easter 1947

No. 2

Officers

President	A. J. Doig.
Chairman	S. H. Bottoms.
Hon. Secretary	E. Jones.
Hon. Treasurer	C. R. Sexton.
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Editorial

THE Geographical Society was re-constituted in September 1946, and since that time most of the pre-war activities of the Society have been resumed. Lectures have been given at fortnightly intervals, and posters of varying sizes and excellence have appeared from time to time advertising them. Despite the distinctly unco-operative nature of the weather, the rambling instinct of the Society has been revived—our adventures on Colly Hill and in the Caterham district are recorded within—and the practice of an end of term feed and visit to the theatre has also been restored. Perhaps the most tangible resumption has been in the form of this magazine, which is to report our growing activities and provide a permanent record of them. To quote the editorial of its predecessor in 1940—

"In addition to being a mere record, it is hoped that this News Sheet will contain an article or two of general interest to members . . ."

—it will be noticed that several articles of general interest are included in this magazine. We are very grateful to those old members who have contributed to this number and wish them the best of luck on their future travels.

The rate of progress of the Society can be seen from the fact that all the speakers in the Christmas Term were members of the staff (to whom thanks are also due), while room was found for only two of them in the Spring Term; the lectures being given by members of the School, two of whom were members of the Society, on their experiences at home and abroad. The growing independence of the Society will, it is hoped, show itself more strongly during the summer term when various sectional activities will come into operation. It is intended that these sections should run independently within the Society and provide for members a more practical aspect than has hitherto been presented.

Our feeling of success as we look back upon two terms is in no small measure due to the efforts of the Staff—both those who have spoken to us and those who have fed us—but the foundation of the Society has always been and will always be the Chairman. May he long continue to be our "guide, philosopher, and friend".

E. J.

Chairman's Remarks

IT is a real pleasure to be able to write a few sentences introducing this magazine. Its predecessor was published in Summer 1940, since when, owing to the war and evacuation, there has been no further issue. The previous effort was called the News Sheet and consisted of four pages; this has a more dignified title and is a more ambitious attempt at a magazine worthy of the Geographical Society of this School. This has been in no small measure due to members of the school staff who have provided excellent talks, to members of the committee and old members of the Society who have written articles and comments and to the secretary who, it is believed, likes, with Mr. Monnaie's kind permission, to play with the printing press.

For a very long time it has been my desire to see other possible activities of the Society developing, e.g. map, geological, meteorological, photograph and local study sections. I do not wish to see members content with merely attending lectures and rambles but also producing individual work in such sections that will remain a permanent record of their membership. I trust, therefore, that the next issue of this magazine will contain reports of work done in these other branches of a still flourishing Geographical Society.

The Christmas Ramble

THE Society, clad in what ranged from obviously ex-W.D. property to mother's old beret, left the train at Epsom Downs, and set off to walk over the slightly snowy downland (where even horses out for a morning trot viewed it with curiosity) to Headley. Here, although the Society was going strongly, the Chairman decreed a 'breather' one hundred yards from a Public House, and ten yards from a Cafe, though none dared to use the former and few wished to use the latter. Amusement was provided by some exploring members hastily leaving a field, hotly pursued by two animals once mistaken for cows.

And so past Pebble Hill, into a snow-storm indiscrimin-

ately covering puddles and plodders, and causing much faulty navigation. An extra-ordinary meeting was interrupted by the appearance of a car—the snowy path was apparently a snowy road—and a snowy Society left in haste (via a private garden) for Colley Hill, where a snowy chairman expounded enthusiastically upon scarp slopes to an uninterested audience.

Lunch at Kingswood revived all, though the weaker brethren succumbed to the timely arrival of an 80 bus. Faces were less blue and noses less red as the Society battled snowily northwards to Burgh Heath—where the expected tea was not. The Society's stomach was saved, however, by the initiative of chairman and secretary in discovering a rather Oriental dive complete with swimming pool, and its feet preserved by the L.P.T.B. which condescendingly conveyed us 'chez nous'.

Odd Bods

Wye College

There has been a teaching centre of some kind in Wye for 500 years and an Agricultural College for about 50. Before the war it was the joint concern of Kent, Surrey and Sussex, though closely linked with London University. Now, however, it is an integral part of the University. A Professor of Agriculture is coming from New Zealand and he will, no doubt, soon be joined by a Horticultural colleague.

It is difficult to decide whether to call Wye a large village or a small town. Compared with most villages it is big and ugly enough to be a town: compared with towns, it has sufficiently few shops and other amenities to be a village, yet it has many good points. The buildings straggle from the River Stour nearly to the foot of the North Downs at the beginning of one of the most beautiful valleys in Kent—where the river goes through the Downs to Canterbury, the Thanet marshes, and the sea. Even the uglier houses have acquired a certain mellowness with age, and the hills make an imposing background.

Before the railway was built Wye was a market town, and Ashford described as "near Wye". The railway works and junction, and the resultant expansion of Ashford led to

a rapid reversal of the address however, if only because the gasworks has disappeared!

The College has a solid collection of buildings near the Church, parts dating, like the Church, to 1447. Recently a large house and land have been bought outside the village to house women students, completing College control of over six hundred acres of farm land, comprising three farms and a horticultural unit; all run as a commercial enterprise. The soils vary from thin light loams over chalk to heavy limes overlying gault; but the finest are developed over the brickearth deposits which are fairly extensive in the river terraces. These are ideal for the great majority of farm and garden crops, and are among the best lands in the country. Although the farm is run with ordinary labour and as a profit-making concern, it is available for demonstration purposes and for the organisation of field trials.

When the College reopened after the war, it was amalgamated with Swanley Horticultural College, which the war had left without buildings: so that for the first time in its history Wye had both men and women students. Women students had been at Wye before, when the Land Army opened a training centre early in the war.

The aim of the College is to train students in the scientific principles of Agriculture and Horticulture. Wye training alone does not produce young farmers; practical experience is necessary too, and the B. Sc. degree courses really demand more pure science than a potential farmer is prepared to learn. With practical experience the graduate should make a good farmer, or general advisory officer; or with further scientific training should be capable of dealing with some knotty technical problems.

As part of a University, Wye suffers in being so far from the other Colleges, but there are plenty of outside activities and the sports teams are building up to pre-war strength. Although there are only about 150 students, the old Wye made a very good shewing in inter-college sporting events, except rowing—the Stour not being navigable except by a very sturdy canoe. Even though the valley is a snow trap in February and a wind tunnel in March, Wye as an Agricultural College, would lose a lot if it were moved nearer London, or, in fact, moved at all.

R. C. Seeley.

The Friday Lectures

THE Headmaster, as President of the Society, gave the inaugural lecture, on 'Character and Geographical Environment', which set a high standard of discussion, and opened many new fields of thought. His main point was that human character in its early stages is influenced by environment, but that man had an original power to overcome any weakness in his personality formed in his immaturity.

Mr. Larkin was the second speaker, and told us in very colourful words of his experiences in the 'Middle East'. We shall always remember the stories of Italian trains with egg-shaped wheels and wildly gesticulating railway staff; of 'genuwine Erabs', and smart limousines. One of the most interesting lectures, it was vividly descriptive, and well illustrated.

'The Rock' proved to be an interesting lecture on Gibraltar, given by Mr. Judge. We were told, after a lengthy geographical introduction, of Gibraltar's war effort, of the Vanta, and of Chad-like monkeys who, given the slightest opportunity, attempted to knock out one's brains. The rest of the population seemed to consist of undesirable natives referred to as 'Wogs'.

The next lecture, entitled 'With a Jeep in Malaya', was given by Mr. Lewis and dealt with the lighter side of his duties in clearing up after the Japs. Touching lightly upon the geographical aspect, the speaker, with his inimitable style and informal method of presentation, made it the most humorous lecture to date. Mr. Lewis told us of his jobs as trailer of (literal) house-lifters, and his methods of transforming a fiithy village into a dirty one. He also told us of his adventures in an abandoned, and rather temperamental launch which could have been seen careering in and out of harbours, jetties, and sandbanks during his brief stay at Penang.

The first lecture of the Spring Term was given by Mr. Dunkley who explained the meaning of V.A.C. and C.H.A., and the differences between them. It was a short talk, well presented, and gave us an insight into the working of these organizations, based on the speaker's personal experience.

A fortnight later Mr. Samuel gave an extremely interesting talk on 'South Africa' illustrated with a large number of

photographs, and practical examples of native work. His account of adventures with wild animals was given added poignancy with the skin of a snake which he also brought along. His personal experiences with a night's growth of moss, and hailstorms, will remind members of South Africa's climate in a far more interesting manner than a school text-book.

'Switzerland' was the subject of the next speaker, Mr. F. Harbert, whose talk was full of unconscious humour. He told of the Swiss mountains and lakes, their amazingly clean towns, and the high degree of mechanisation in schools. His talk culminated in a description, accompanied by appropriate gestures, of the preparation of a 'Swiss Breakfast'.

Mr. Chapman gave an interesting lecture on some of the Isles of Greece—one of which, by cultural as opposed to geographical definition, was Athens. The first island on which he landed had average gradients of about one in three, and transport in the form of an ancient car which withstood all the Greek driver's efforts to wreck it. Two things which all parts of Greece had in common were the limitless olive trees, and the ability of the population to live on next to nothing.

E. J.

Schleswig-Holstein Today

"THE Danes are taking over Schleswig-Holstein on 3rd March 1947". So runs the current piece of German wishful thinking in this province, that formed part of Denmark before Bismark began his nefarious schemes. But the Danes themselves show no inclination to advance south of the arbitrary border. They regard Schleswig-Holstein as a potential mill-stone round their necks and consider that such an expansion would be to their own detriment. Why should this be so when this province is the richest agricultural area in Germany?

The reasons are manifold. First, the country is still very fertile and almost untouched by the harsh hand of war, the last fighting took place south of the railway

junction, Neumunster. But, in common with the rest of Germany, total war has diminished seed stocks and live-stocks to a very low level. All the efforts of Military Government to put agriculture on its feet again are combatted by the large Black Market in farm produce from live cows to bags of flour. In fact, the farming community lives on the fat of the land, especially in outlying districts like the western island of Sylt, and laughs at the 1500 calories per week of its town cousins. Even were it possible to control the food supply to ensure equal distribution, matters would still be very bad.

An influx of refugees, both from the Russian zone, and the harder-hit towns of the Ruhr, and some ex-Displaced Persons, has increased the population of the province by some 60%, approximately 1,000,000 refugees. These, apart from aggravating the food problem overcrowd the living accommodation which is available. They live, for the most part, in squalor without aim or interest in life and are outcasts in the eyes of the natives.

There is very little industry in the area and that is concentrated in Kiel and Hambourg—which is actually a city-state apart from the province. The submarine pens in Kiel have been destroyed and the shipping business is virtually at a standstill. The semi industrial towns of Itzehoe Neumunster and Rendsburg are unimportant from the point of view of rehabilitating Germany economy. In this area only Kiel and Hamburg can rebuild industry and commerce.

And the people are apathetic. In the grip of winter they believe the wildest rumours that we are trying to freeze, starve, or otherwise dispose of them. In common with the rest of Germany (though the plight of Schleswig-Holstein is a little better than most) a wave of petty crime, illegal slaughter of cattle, illicit distilleries, Black Market barter and house breakings, has rushed the German people along with it. One can easily see that the Danes are right to stay over the border. It is 3rd March today and there is still no sign of the Danish Army that would bring, so the Germans believe, unlimited supplies of dairy produce, coal and clothing, while relieving the pressure of the unimaginative British administration.

R. L. F. Sexton.

A Visit To Stonehenge

Living for a period of three months in a hut a mile or so across the Plain from Stonehenge, I decided one afternoon to go to have a look at the place. Stories of Druids and human sacrifices came to mind as a couple of us climbed up the slight incline to where Stonehenge stands in majestic isolation.—Our ideas were rather shattered, however, when we found ourselves paying sixpence at a kiosk for the privilege of looking round this "most famous monument of antiquity in the British Isles."

Moreover the official description, from which I have already quoted, tells us that as far as is known a gentleman named William Stukeley, more or less created the stories of the Druids out of his fertile imagination sometime in the eighteenth century. "This" (I quote the official pamphlet) "was industriously propagated, and in the nineteenth century became a general article of belief." It seems however, that Druids were not even heard of for the best part of a thousand years after Stonehenge was built—about 2500 B.C.—and never used it either.

It was built by a megalithic race which erected these stones as part of their religious ceremony. These people came from France and the Iberian Peninsula, and some are known to have settled in Pembrokeshire where they erected stone circles in the Prescelley Hills. They most probably emigrated to Salisbury Plain and brought their stones with them to put up at Stonehenge with others quarried in Wiltshire and known as Sarsens.

Round the altar stone in the centre, are two horseshoes and two circles of stones while beyond that is evidence of other rings of either stones or wooden uprights. The first horseshoe is of Prescelley stones, singly, six to eight feet high; the second originally consisted of five trilithons of Sarsen stone twenty feet high, and capped with lintels sixteen feet in length. Beyond this the first circle is again of Prescelley stones nine to ten feet high, and then the large circle of thirty upright Sarsens with lintels reaching from one stone to the next—but half these have fallen or disappeared.

To my mind the most amazing thing about the place is how these stone age men shaped the huge stones without metal implements, and dug the holes for them with picks

made from the antlers of the red deer. It seems especially wonderful how they fitted the lintels to the uprights so exactly with mortise and tenon joints cut in the stone itself, that they have stood up to the elements for over four thousand years. These joints, moreover are still such a perfect fit that it was with the greatest difficulty, even using modern methods, some of the fallen lintels were returned to their original position.

Gunner.

The Half-Term Ramble

THE ramble on February 24th 1947 was politely termed a 'Mystery Ramble', because nobody had any previous idea of where we were going, other than that it would take place in the Caterham district. Fifteen members of the Society braved the weather and were well rewarded. The sky was clear, and because of something called insolation, we were warm. Before lunch we walked to Worm's Heath by way of semi-Alpine countryside. The hills were high and steep, and the snow had drifted to great depths in some places. Lunch was eaten with gusto and snowballs, and in the afternoon we kept to the roads, our movements resembling a route march more than a ramble.

Some of the country lanes had snow-drifts several feet deep, but passages had been hacked through them. At a great pace we descended upon Godstone from the hills, ate the tea as quickly as the hostess could place it on the table, and disappeared into the night with feet becoming colder and soggier.

Everybody survived, and at least one member of the society lost a head-cold in the airy Surrey countryside.

D. C. K.

(As the same member put it, "There's nothing like punting a hill about!" — Ed.)

First Flight to Cairo

"All you really need is a sixpenny atlas." The remark came from a moustachioed pilot, and though not addressed at any one in particular, it seemed calculated to intimidate the navigators labouring over their charts,—"All you've got to do is fly South over the Med., turn left along the coast, and right at the first river you hit." In retaliation, a few cryptic comments on the unappreciative nature of pilots in general, and those who sported moustaches in particular, were passed.

The business of briefing continued, but most of the work had been done the day before, and it was now only a question of working out the final details from the latest Met. information.

It was early sunrise when we arrived at our dispersal point—the ground crew were already there, the only signs of life across the deserted airfield. The customs officer looked dourly around the plane; asked if we had any sacks of potatoes or rubber tyres hidden away, and then disappeared as mysteriously as he had come.

With a shudder and a sudden roar the engines came to life... the runway raced beneath, slipped, fell away, and now it was the ground that was moving, slanting and receding, while we seemed to remain steady. We left the rocky inlets, girt with golden sands, the smugglers' coves of the Cornish coast, and headed out across the Channel.

Navigation was confined to those secret aids invented by that stronger species, affectionately christened 'boffins'. It wasn't until we were across Brittany that the clouds disappeared in faint wisps, and we saw the chequered pattern of the small farms of La Vendée. We struck inland across France—the flight engineer misguidedly gave me pinpoints from the wrong map, but fortunately the tortuous meanders of the Lot and the Tarn were unmistakable.

A haze horizon neither receding nor advancing, encircled us; the perfect level of the sea below and the sky above seemed an assurance of everlasting tranquillity. That flight across the Mediterranean seemed endless, the only sensation was the rising temperature. We began to throw off some of our clothing, idly to open the flasks and drink watery coffee. I remember I even attempted to plot a sextant shot taken on the sun, but it was far off the chart,

and up in one corner of the navigation table by the Wireless Operator's elbow.

Then the pilot came to life and, as if from a peak in Darien, pointed to a thin brown strand scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding haze. "That must be Africa!"—a profound remark. It grew and took form; arid sand and rock broken by the regular lines of irrigated cyprus plantations. Half an hour later we were circling the white roofed town of Tripoli—our night staging point.

The next day the heat really hit us, oppressive and aggravating; the air aloft was unstable—at one moment I would be suspended three inches from my seat, and the next, thrust sickeningly downwards with such force that the dividers I happened to be holding, were fixed firmly in the table. To avoid the vicious influence of these convection currents we kept climbing until we reached the smooth air several thousand feet up.

We flew along the North African coast, and names on the map were legion; Benghazi, Tobruk, Sidi Barrani—sentinels in the desert, linked by a single track railway.

The sun which had risen ahead, was now behind us, but before the sudden twilight of the desert closed in we sighted the Nile Delta—vivid green set against the monstrous brown, and the pyramids to the South of Cairo which had been a landmark and a wonder even before the time of Xerxes the Persian.

The horizon rose to meet us as we descended, and soon we settled on the runway, journey completed.

D. H. Crees.

Stop Press: The last lecture of the term was given by Mr. Kelly, a member of the Society, on Edinburgh.

The annual Feed was held on March 27th, when a great deal of excellent food disappeared in an incredibly short time—we would like to take this opportunity of extending our hearty thanks to those members of the kitchen staff who made our celebrations possible. Short speeches by the Chairman and Secretary were followed by a presentation to the Chairman from the Society. After that the theatre party left, to be joined at Wimbledon by some members of the staff (including our caretaker) whom we also welcomed to the Feed. — E. J.