

WESTENDER

Newsletter of the West End Local History Society
Winter 2024



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Membership fees £12 per annum. Payment may be made by bank transfer:

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West End Museum at the Old Fire Station in the snow 2010

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S.O.S.

Save Our Society!

Most of our committee members have served loyally for many years and cannot be expected to continue indefinitely. Neville has already announced that he will not be standing for re-election as chairman at the A.G.M. in April. Other committee members may also want a break. If you value the Society and would like to see it continue, please consider standing for election in April.

If you are interested in a committee post, please contact any of the existing committee, who will be happy to explain what is involved.

Without a committee, the Society – and the museum – will have to close.

The Origin of Swan Nurseries

By Rod Clay

Between 1949 & 1950 my father Richard (Dick) Clay was approached by Simon Baring (of the Baring family) to view gardens and land that was for sale by the Swaythling family. Simon & Pamela Baring then purchased the walled garden at Townhill Park estate, Marhill Copse and Marshes, also a strip of land fronting Townhill Park House (now the football pitch used by West End).

My father would have liked the field fronting the A27 main road. As the grounds were approximately the same size, an agreement with Middlesex County Council to swap the land was made. Agreeing to accept the building and running of the proposed nursery, we moved from Balldown Nurseries, Sparsholt to the bungalow on the estate. His job was to look after the fruit and flower side of the walled garden and also to develop the nursery which was to become Swan Nursery.

Mr. Rose (Fred Rose) had been asked to stay on to look after the shrubs. After Mr. Rose retired and moved to West End, we moved from the bungalow into his house (Head Gardener's Cottage). Mr. Ken Billen was also employed by the Barings and lived next to Head Gardener's Cottage. His job was to grow and produce trees and shrubs for the business.

To acquire a registered name, Mr. Simon Baring bought Jeffery & Sons Ltd., a florist at Black Swan Buildings, Jewry Street, Winchester. They kept the shop and sold the flowers that were grown at the walled-in garden (and eventually to Swan Nursery) until the shop in Winchester was sold to Hilliers. Mr. Ken Billen then went on to rent a piece of land that belonged to the Barings at the bottom of Gater's Hill, adjacent to Marhill Copse, and called his business Billen Ltd.; a completely separate business from Swan Nursery. Ken Billen later purchased a strip of land at the top of Gater's Hill (now Hill Top Cottage Development) from the Barings to build a house which he called Hill Top Cottage. In approximately 1966, Mr. Billen sold the house to Mr. & Mrs. David McGarrah and moved to Plaitford. He died in October 2005.

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In approximately 1951-52, on the land at the top of the hill where Haskins is today, greenhouses, shed and offices were built. Some of the staff from Townhill Park Gardens joined the nursery staff, including Hans, an ex p.o.w. Peter Clifford joined Ken Billen at his business, Bille Ltd. at the bottom of the hill as a shrub and tree man. He stayed with Ken Billen until he moved to Plaitford, then left Billen Ltd. to become an employee of the Post Office. Some of the other staff who worked for Lord Swaythling under Mr. Rose took employment with Middlesex County Council, who had purchased Townhill Park House & Gardens. After Fred Rose retired, they took on a new Head Gardener, a Mr. Russell, who moved into Dairy Cottage. Mr. Eckrott was Under Gardener to Mr. Russell. On Mr. Russell's retirement, Mr. Eckrott became Head Gardener and moved into Dairy Cottage. Hans left the nursery and joined Mr. Eckrott and Mr. Horace Fanstone at Townhill Park House & Gardens.

My father used to cycle from Head Gardener's Cottage, Townhill to the nursery to oversee the building and development of the eventual Swan Nursery. When the first two greenhouses were completed, the first crops grown were mushrooms. After more greenhouses were added, he swapped production to sweet peas, cut flowers and bedding plants. His main love were sweet peas, which he grew seed for under contract for Carter's Seeds and also showed the sweet pea flowers at the Chelsea Flower Show under the name Carter's Seeds. He won at least two gold medals. When the flowers had been picked ready to go up to Chelsea, they were stored in the cellar of Gater's Guest House (the Black House, later Manor Clinic and now the Priory Rehabilitation Clinic) to keep them cool. No cold store then!



Swan Nurseries original shop with manager Richard (Dick) Clay in 1954
Author's own photo

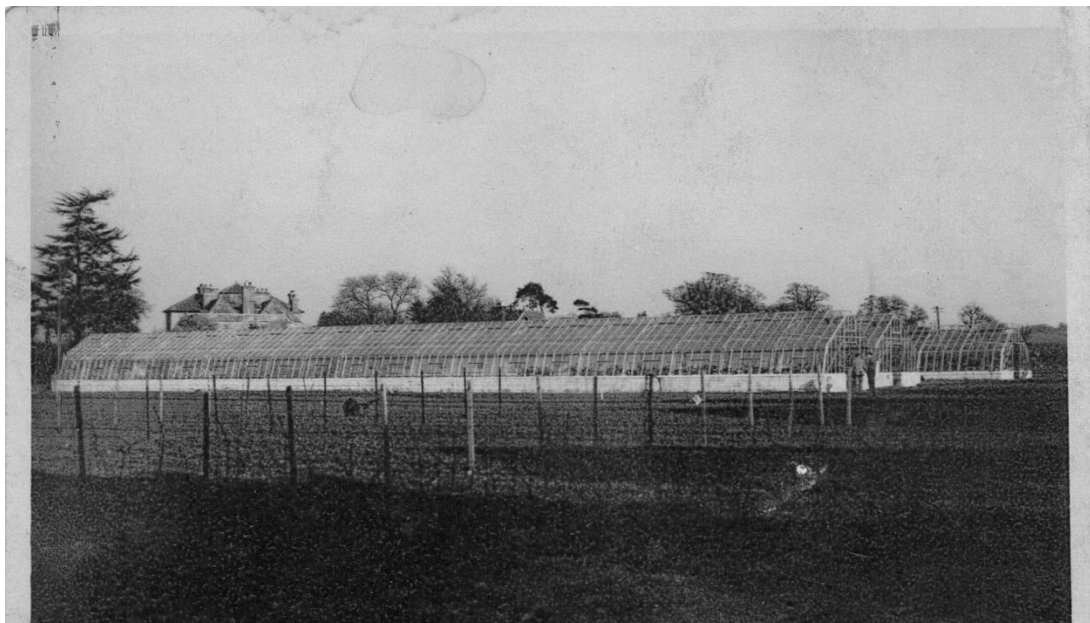
About 1953-54, my father took some flowers and fruit to a bench at the entrance to the nursery on the A27. Within a few hours they had all sold. They then decided to build a flower stall and a small layby was made to accommodate cars and the flower stall.

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My father decided it was best to sell direct to the public than to go to the wholesalers. Cut out the middle-man. Over the next decade, a new prefabricated shop was erected and the layby made bigger for more cars, coaches, etc. While the walled-in gardens were still in operation, produce like grapes, peaches, apples, pears and plums were brought down and sold at the shop. At Swan Nursery we grew raspberries, strawberries and runner beans alongside sweet peas, freesias, chrysanthemums, daffodils, tulips, other bulbs and carnations. What was not needed for the shop, we sent to Burgess, Webb & Squire Wholesalers, Southampton. We also purchased flowers that we didn't grow on the nursery.



Customers at first Swan Nurseries shop in 1954
Author's own photo



Some of the Swan Nurseries greenhouses with Gaters's Hill House in the background
Author's own photo

My mother, Mrs. Myrtle Clay, built up a business making wedding bouquets and wreathes and she also worked in the nurseries helping with the growing. My father and mother also formed a company called Rainbow Flowers Ltd. They coloured carnations, irises and other cut flowers. The flowers were placed in liquid to take up the dye. Around about 1956, a new house was built at the nursery, which we moved into. Shortly afterwards, the walled-in garden, the two cottages and the bungalow were sold to Brown Bothers Builders. They did not intend to use it for growing but to wait to develop the site.

After Simon Baring died, his brothers Edmund and Aubrey Baring wanted to clean up and open Marhill Copse (then known as Swan Copse), to charge the visitors to raise money for charity. They approached me to build a mist propagation unit to grow cuttings from the shrubs for eventual sale in the nursery. The cutting nursery did become operational and Swan Copse (Marhill Copse) was opened to the public for a couple of seasons. When Edmund Baring died, it was decided to bring the two greenhouses back up to Swan Nurseries to carry on the cuttings there. The copse and marshland at the bottom of the hill alongside the A27 was sold to Rodney Wright, the local blacksmith.

My brother Nigel Clay also worked alongside me for a number of years. My father died in 1968 and my mother and I carried on managing the business. Then Mr. Giles Baring became managing director. I left the nurseries in 1971 to join another nursery. My mother stayed on until she retired.

The nursery was eventually sold to accountants with Mr. Giles Baring staying as consultant. It was then sold to Mr. Lilywhite of Country Garden with Mr. Ken Waterers as Manager. They demolished the old glasshouses and built two greenhouses for a garden centre, which incorporated Little Amazon Camping business and a glass business, with some of the outside ground rented to a swimming pool business and a tool hire company. In 1994, Haskins bought the site and the new garden centre was built, including Hobbycraft.

An Ordinary Woman's War – Part Three

By Emily Dimmock

Clothes were a problem; they had been on coupons since 1941, so I joined a mend-and-make-do class, making shirts for my little boy from his father's worn ones, making aprons from all sorts of things and unpicking pre-war knitted garments and re-knitting them. We went round the country outside Southampton collecting wood where it had fallen from the trees to help out our fuel ration, picked blackberries for which we had hoarded some sugar to make jam. It was a case of always doing something to help us survive. I remember the pile of old aluminium pots and pans collected at the end of every road, which was used to make badly needed aircraft.

We had taken a lot with very little to defend ourselves with and when I saw the bombers, the Flying Fortresses, setting out for Germany in the evening sunlight over our house, I felt triumphant and cannot truthfully say that I felt anything for the Germans who were to be attacked. We had had these awful years living in air-raid shelters, surrounded by barrage balloons, enduring shortages of everything, had seen boys back from Dunkirk, Narvik, Brest, Dieppe, who were suddenly men. Not seeing others for years; they had disappeared out to the Western Desert, calling in at ports in South Africa on the way, from whence kind people in South Africa would get their home addresses and

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write to relatives here and say they had seen them en route. The Germans had overrun Poland, France, obliterated Rotterdam in one afternoon and almost starved the Dutch, invaded the Scandinavian counties. No, I had no sympathy.

Rockets I heard about, of course. None came near us, but doodle-bugs (pilotless planes), yes. We heard their two-stroke engines, like a motorcycle, and so long as we could hear them knew they were passing us. But one came down two roads away, blowing in my front door, my back door and laying me flat between them.

Then came D Day. This is what it is called now, but to me it was the day I went for a walk with my three year old son to visit the rabbits on the barrage balloon site, something we did frequently. The rabbits were to help out the rations for the aircrew on the site. As we came home, we found that all the roads were lined on either side with camouflaged khaki-coloured vehicles, ranging from huge tanks to small jeeps. There were the amphibious vehicles and armoured cars. My son was in the seventh heaven and instead of going home we patrolled road after road to gaze at these marvels until we eventually reached our house. One the pavement outside were little brown tents, large enough for one person, and beside them more tanks and army vehicles of every description. We made the soldiers a cup of tea, they used our bathroom and we all settled for the night. I said nothing but went to bed full of fears that air raids would start again in the night, should the Germans know about this mustering of strength. I felt we were again a target. Next morning, they were still there; we offered them breakfast, but they had all they wanted with them. They were there all day, with nothing much doing. Again, they had tea and a bath and we settled for the night as we thought, but next morning they were all gone, nothing left to say that they had ever been there and no sound of their departure. There was just a note of thanks on the back doorstep and a couple of tins of sardines – treasure indeed! From that day to this, my son has had an unceasing interest in model army vehicles and still collects them. Those soldiers were young men and I wonder how many of them survived the invasion of France. The slogans we heard most frequently then were “is your journey really necessary” and “careless talk costs lives”. The last one impressed me because I thought I had not seen very much of my husband lately and all the vehicles would need lubricants, but not a word had he said. We not only took notice of slogans, we patriotically did not use electricity for ironing, etc. at the time of day factories were needing it and we would only use buses between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. so that transport was left for those on war work.

On V.E. Day, with our neighbours, we shared a bottle of sherry which had been hoarded all through the war, went out into the garden, opened every window and door, turned on every light. They blazed out. No blackout. It was marvellous.

Then V.J. Day and the Japanese prisoners-of-war coming home. Men in their twenties and older looked the size of boys of fourteen, with the most revolting, heart-breaking, terrible stories to tell of their treatment.

I am now nearly 81 years of age and what I have described here happened nearly fifty years ago. I know it is a terse, rather grim account of what happened to me, but it was grim. It was six years of my life and there must have been humorous incidents, of course, and emotional ones, too, but to describe them would be a lengthy task. Humour and comedy were supplied by the radio

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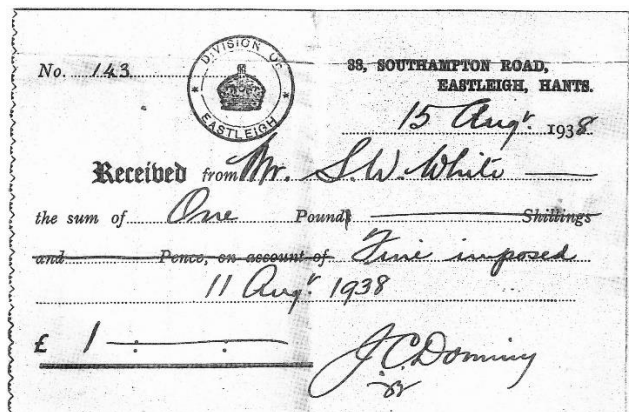
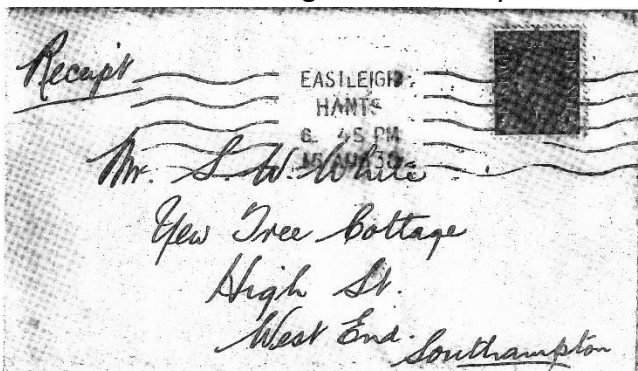
programmes of that time, there was endless advice about food from Lord Woolton, the Food Minister, with recipes for using what food we had, such as the Woolton Pie made principally of potatoes and carrots but without onions, which we didn't see for a very long time. My wartime recipes are marvels of ingenuity. What was funny to us, was the broadcast each day by William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw), with his "Gairmany calling, Gairmany calling", giving us Heer Goebel's propaganda, none of which we believed. One thing I must stress, though, is the spirit of the people. During all the ordeals, I never once heard even a murmur that we should give in. We all felt we were quite capable of stopping Hitler and his Nazis.

Thank you to Sue Fitch for providing this account, written in September 1989, by her aunt, Emily Louisa Dimmock née Freak (1908-2003), sister of Rose Hare. Emily's last years were spent at Elizabeth Court, West End.

WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWS

Hatch Grange

In August, a group of travellers were evicted from Hatch Grange. Ian Dunbar thought our readers may be interested to hear about his uncle, Jack White, who was fined £1 for trespass on Hatch Grange on 11th August 1938. Jack was a labourer on the building sites who had been collecting firewood on Hatch Grange when money was short.



MeasuringWorth.com calculates that £1 in 1938 would be worth £80.65 today. The Office of National Statistics tells us that the average weekly wage for a adult male full-time worker in 1938 was £3 10s (£3.50) - which MeasuringWorth.com calculates as the equivalent of £282.30 in today's currency. So, in effect, Uncle Jack's free firewood had cost him almost a third of a week's wage! Thank you, Ian, for sharing your Uncle Jack's experience with us.

Hatch Café

The Hatch Café in the Parish centre has been refurbished. It has now re-opened for business with a new kitchen, serving area and seating layout.

FORTHCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

16th November-5th January – An Enchanted Christmas at Hinton Ampner

“Hop on a Christmas journey with us and discover the house brimming with bright Christmas colours, sparkling lights and charming festive scenes. From the world of the Ice Queen to a Woodland Ball, Gingerbread Village and the North Pole Workshop. Christmas elves are busy making toys & games – and getting in a muddle!”

Timed tickets. Pre-booking essential.

20th November – 5th January – Wonderland Christmas at The Vyne (National Trust) 11a.m.-3 p.m. (Closed 24th & 25th Dec)

“With sparkling trees and quirky displays, in The Vyne's house and gardens, lose yourself in Lewis Carroll's dreamlike children's classics Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Alice Through the Looking-Glass. In the gardens, look out for displays dotted about such as the Queen of Hearts' army on the north lawn. On the ground floor of the house, sparkling trees illuminate whimsical scenes from 'Looking-Glass' such as a giant chess board where, in the story, Alice must play boldly to become a queen. There's even an 'illogical' room where glittering upside-down Christmas trees point disconcertingly to the floor. Collecting your trail sheet from Visitor Reception, enjoy nonsensical Alice-themed challenges before collecting your prize. £2 per trail sheet and chocolate/sweet prize.”

23rd November – 5th January – A Christmas Crackers at Mottisfont (National Trust) 10a.m.-4 p.m. (Last entry 30 mins before closing. Closed 24th & 25th Dec)

“Follow Clara and her Nutcracker Prince into a wintry wonderland filled with swirling snowflakes. In the Land of Sweets, Sugarplum fairies dance among candy canes, and a thrilling duel unfolds between the Prince and the Mouse King. The story will unfold as you start to wander through the rooms filled up with sparkling trees as well as decorations, light effects and music. The adventure extends outdoors with a Nutcracker-themed family activity trail.”

Booking advisable.

Sat 23rd November-Sunday 24th November – Watts Weekend – Avenue St. Andrew's United Reformed Church, Southampton SO17 1XQ

All weekend: Watt's exhibition, memorabilia, literature, books & images.

Saturday: Study Day. 11a.m.-12 noon talk by Allyson Hayes & Wendy Stokes “Richard Cockle Lucas & the Statue of Isaac Watts.” 1.p.m.-2.30 p.m. Watts-themed writing workshop. 2.30p.m. talk by Dr. Cheryl Butler “Gunpowder, Treason & Plot: religious strife from the Reformation Act to the Act of Toleration.” (the context around Watt's life and work). 4p.m. Sarah Siddons Fan Club presents a drama – a mini “Life & Times of Isaac Watts”.

Sunday: Watt's church service 10.30 a.m. with members of the Brockenhurst Choir premiering the prize-winning entry to the Watt's choral singing competition, Matthew Kelley's choral setting of “Christ Inviting and the Church Answering” and the presentation of the prize.

All events are free, but for the study day, please send your name and a note of which talk or workshop you are signing up for, to: Office@asaurc.org.uk

Fri 6th – Sun 8th December – Christmas Tree Festival – St. James's Church, West End

Displays of Christmas trees decorated by local groups and businesses. Refreshments.

Mon 9th December, Wed 11th Dec & Fri 13th December 7:30 p.m. “A Stranger’s Guide: A Gothic Story”—where history and hilarity collide!

“The Sarah Siddons Fan Club Theatre invite you to join the ghostly whispers of Jane Austen’s contemporaries, Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray, as they embark on a spine-tingling perambulation around our charming old town. In celebration of the upcoming 250th anniversary of Jane Austen’s birth in 2025, we’re throwing a gothic soirée that promises to be as dramatic as a romantic entanglement in a drawing room! We follow Horace and Thomas on their quest for gothic inspiration. Will they find it on the streets of Southampton? Or perhaps in the suspiciously foggy alleyways? Stories of dark deeds, naughty nuns and a cross-dressing French spy! Only time (and a little bit of theatrical magic) will tell!”

Tickets £7

For tickets and more information, visit www.sarahsiddonsfanclub.org.uk

Sat 14th December Christmas Carol Concert 6.30 p.m. – Chapel, Royal Victoria Country Park

£5 per person including parking. Tickets available from the Park shop from 9th November.

JANE AUSTEN 250 EVENTS

16th Feb 2025 – Jane Austen Romance Cream Tea & Quiz (with prizes) at Waterstone’s bookshop 2.00-3.30p.m.

Saturday 3rd May 2025 – “Placing Jane” Study Day Mast Mayflower Studios, Above Bar Street, Southampton SO14 7DU 9.45 a.m.-5.45 p.m.

Followed by a private viewing of the “A Very Respectable Company” exhibition at Sea City Museum 5p.m.-6 p.m.

Early Bird Tickets £25 (rising to £28 in early 2025) including lunch & refreshments.

www.mayflower.org.uk/whats-on/placing-jane-2025

HANGER FARM EVENTS

Hanger Farm is a social enterprise of Minstead Trust, a charity that supports people with learning disabilities.

Hanger Farm, Aikman Lane, Totton SO40 8FT

Box Office 023 8066 7683

hangerfarm@minsteadtrust.org.uk

Sun 8th December – “Jingle All the Way – A Magical Family Christmas Show” 2 p.m. / 5.30 p.m.

“Bring your family to a festive extravaganza filled with festive cheer, delightful performances and unforgettable moments. With a special goody bag for every member of the audience and a visit from Father Christmas!”

£12 / £10

11th-15th December – “Pocket Theatre presents Aladdin” 1 p.m. / 4 p.m. / 7 p.m.

“This new and hilarious production of Aladdin will captivate kids of all ages and give mums, dads and grandparents more than just a good laugh along the way.”

£12.50 / £7.50

Thurs 19th December – “Five Star Swing at Christmas” 7.30 p.m.

“Swing n’ sing-along into Christmas with the unique Five Star Swing band! Enjoy all your favourite Christmas songs with the dynamic swing band treatment from Glen Miller, Sinatra, Basie and Nat King Cole, jazzing up those jingle bells.”

£17 / £15

WEST END LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**All events take place at West End Parish Centre, Chapel Road SO30 3FE and begin at 7.30 p.m.
Members free. Visitors welcome (£2 per person per meeting). Membership £12 per year.**

Programme of Talks 2025

January	NO MEETING
February 5 th	“Murder Mayhem, Pillage & Plunder” – Dr. Cheryl Butler
March 5 th	“Southampton and the Second 100 Years’ War” – Andy Skinner
April 2 nd	A.G.M. – plus “From the Solent to Howard’s Way: a brief history of Southampton Water – Stephen Hoadley
May 7 th	“The Mysterious Disappearance of the Irish Crown Jewels” – Steve Herra
June 4 th	“Royal Victoria Hospital / Netley Abbey Village” – Ursula Pearce
July 2 nd	“Lepe Beach: the D-Day Mulberry Harbour Construction Site – Dr. Henry Goodall NONFA
August 6 th	“The Pilgrim Fathers and Southampton” – Jake Simpkin
Sept. 3 rd	“Southampton’s Missing Vikings” – Andy Skinner
Oct. 1 st	“Southampton, Water, Slaughter & Trade” – Andrew Negus
Nov. 5 th	“Vietnam Veterans Remembrance Wall” – Jeremy Prescott
Dec. 3 rd	SOCIAL EVENING – raffle, drinks provided, bring your own plate of food – plus “Shopping in the High Street in the 1940s and 50s – John Pitman

Articles for Westender

You don’t have to be a historian to write for Westender. We would love to hear your memories of growing up in the village.

email: suballard@yahoo.co.uk

or leave hard copies at the museum addressed to Sue Ballard, please.

Closing Date for contributions to Spring Issue: 10th February 2025.