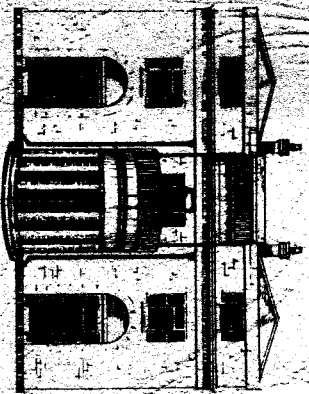


A HISTORY
OF



ASHDOWN
HOUSE

INTRODUCTION

In their penultimate years at Ashdown children are asked to do a History project, on a subject of their own choosing. Guide-lines are given, parents are encouraged to enthuse and to help, and the project begins to take shape. The subjects are usually fairly predictable: the Armada, or the Black Death, or the Six Wives of Henry VIII, or Castles, or, from the girls mainly, something to do with social history, with costume or housing or health. It is a matter of choice, though children do have to be steered away from subjects such as "A History of Torture", on the not entirely specious grounds that our library simply has insufficient material!

Another popular topic is local history, and it was from a chance remark on the subject, six months ago, that this present work stemmed. One boy was complaining bitterly that he had visited the nearest public library during the holidays and it had had simply nothing on the village where he lived. Schoolmasterly scorn was poured upon his claim. He had obviously not looked in the right place: there was always some information. A few minutes spent in East Grinstead library, for example, would provide plenty of material for a history of Ashdown House, even if there was relatively little about the last hundred years.

So much for schoolmasterly self-confidence, and apologies to the individual concerned! The "few minutes" turned into several hours as an exhaustive search revealed nothing but the fact that the house had been built by Latrobe and that a Captain G. Granville Wells had been tenant in 1862. This was very mysterious: there just had to be more information than this, but where was it?

The answers to that question came slowly at first, and then, as if doing a crossword, where the solution of one clue helps with the solution of another, they came more and more readily. One local historian set me on the trail, the County Record Office in Lewes provided more information: there were old entry-books and some copies of school magazines and then there were the reminiscences of those who had known and loved Ashdown over the course of many years.

The whole thing became, to change the analogy, a giant jigsaw whose many varied pieces presented an almost irresistible challenge. That there will be more than a few deficiencies and inaccuracies in this account is inevitable: they are entirely the fault of the author, not the fault of those who have helped so generously in the search and who are more fully thanked in the last of the Appendixes.

Christopher Richmond May 1991

Chapter 1

"Ashdown House is a large country house, standing high in its own park, facing due South and overlooking Ashdown Forest, a moorland expanse of heather and gorse. It is near Forest Row Station, Southern Railway, about four miles from East Grinstead and within comfortable distance of London, Brighton and Tunbridge Wells.

Its situation is particularly healthy and bracing, and the grounds and the neighbourhood are exceptionally beautiful. The house, protected from the North and North-East, gets the full benefit of the sun; the winter temperature is high and the rainfall small; the grounds dry quickly, both from their position on rising ground and the nature of the soil, which is sand and sandy loam."

These paragraphs from the 1936 Prospectus give a fair picture of the physical aspect of the neighbourhood, as well as casting an interesting sidelight onto the importance that used always to be attached fifty years ago to the bracing quality of the air and the excellence of the local soil! The Southern Railway is long gone, of course, and the station at Forest Row is no more than a memory: the railway line itself is now Forest Way, a country trail, and only the railway bridge over which you pass to reach the School still stands as a reminder that trains once pulled their way below our meadows.

But all that is very recent history, and this first chapter deals with what is known and what can be surmised about the immediate area from the very earliest times up to the rebuilding of the southern part of the house by Latrobe towards the end of the eighteenth century.

So, to begin at the beginning, we must look not South towards the old railway line and the fertile plain of the Medway, but North to the heavily wooded hills and to the track that lies just beyond them. That track, nowadays known as Cansiron Lane, was once one of the original ridgeways that people followed thousands of years before the Romans came to Britain and settled the land. It was used by hunters, by traders, by iron-workers and by charcoal-burners; it avoided the wet clay of the valleys on either side of it and must have been the only path through forests that were then so much more dense than they are today. It is itself crossed by another iron Age ridge-way running from Dry Hill to Wych Cross and beyond; our own path is a single section of the track that stretches from Tunbridge Wells to Tunners Hill.

What is known about the Celtic tribes that inhabited this region in the centuries before Christ? Certainly not very much, but we do know that they were not the wild, wool painted savages of popular myth. Celtic craftsmen were often the superiors of their Roman counterparts, especially in such crafts as metal-working. The iron industry was flourishing in Britain well before the Romans came and it was indeed the lure of our mineral resources that was a major factor in the Roman decision to invade. There was gold and tin and lead, and there was not only iron but a plentiful supply of wood to form the charcoal that would smelt the iron.

The invasion finally came in 43 A.D. and this area of the country was more closely affected than most. One of the great Roman roads was pushed through from London to Lewes, crossing the road to Hartfield only three miles from here, not very far from the Gallipot Inn. Sections of the road have been uncovered, at

Holtve and up in Ashdown Forest. Not long afterwards, probably about 100 A.D., a huge iron-working centre was established between Great Cansiron Farm and the Hammerwood stream. How important a works it was can easily be assessed today, nearly two thousand years later. The site occupies between three and four acres and the soil is still black with the dust and debris of the charcoal they used to smelt the iron-ore, and so full of fragments and droplets of iron-slag and iron-ore that you can pick up a handful of them without moving from the spot.

Between 406 and 410 A.D. the legions were recalled for the defence of Rome itself, and our country, prosperous and peace-loving as it had now become, lay almost unprotected, a plum ripe for picking. The Great Cansiron iron-works closed; the miners, charcoal-burners and farmers drifted away; the wooden bridges on the Holtve—Gallipot section of the road collapsed and the road itself became impassable and was finally forgotten. But eventually, after perhaps a couple of hundred years, people started to drift back to the area. Swineherds fattened their pigs on the autumn acorns and beechmast. Some were Jutes, pushing south-west from the north coast of Kent, while some were Saxons who were moving further inland each year from their settlements along the South Downs. We may guess that when they met they often came to blows over grazing rights, but until the land was settled on a permanent basis there may have not been too much pressure about actual ownership.

By the time of the Conquest, four hundred years or so later still, ownership had become a matter of legal record, and we can discover the first traces of Ashdown House, not that any such name then existed. The very first time the name was used was in 1794, but that story belongs to the next chapter. Until then it was known variously as Lavortie, L'Anerkeye, Laverie, Larkeye, Lavertie and Lafertie, and ended up in the Act of Parliament of 1793 as Lavortye. Spelling was hardly an exact science in those days; many of our children must wish that the same cavalier attitude still prevailed. The most likely derivation of the name, according to the experts, is that it comes from two Anglo-Saxon words: "lawer-teag", meaning "a lark-frequented enclosure", though a more prosaic derivation has also been suggested, from "laefer-teag", a place of the reeds and rushes. For what it is worth, you can still hear the larks today, while there is a distinct shortage of reeds and rushes.

And so to the Domesday Book of 1086 and to yet another of the puzzles that history would-be historian. Search as you will for any variation of the name, there is simply no mention of the place, but there is this entry in the East Cantsiron Hundred which may well refer to it: "Ansfrid holds two hides less one virgate from the Count outside the Rape (of Pevensey): King Edward held them: they lay in the Manor of Ditchling. They did not pay tax. Land for six ploughs. From the woodland and grazing six pigs: meadow one acre; a forge; six villagers with two ploughs. Value before 1066 fifteen shillings; value now twenty shillings." Possible light on the virgate appears in this abstract from the Hundred of Hartfield: "In Apredec the Count himself holds half a hide... there is a virgate where the Count has his Hall: Earl Harold had it likewise." Apredec was probably Upper Parrock, which was part of the Ashdown estate until well into the nineteenth century.

It seems more than likely that Laverie was a sub-manor of Brambletye

which has its own entry in Domesday; certainly the two manors were inextricably linked throughout the Middle Ages. They had once been owned by Cola, a Saxon thegn, and after the Conquest they were gifted by William to the Count of Mortain, his half-brother. The two hides which Ansfrið held appear to correspond fairly accurately with the half-feudation (about three hundred and twenty acres) held by Nicholaia de Aldeham as tenant of John de Monte Acuto (Montague) in 1296, the same year in which John applied to the Bishop of Chichester, the Prior of Lewes and Master Alard of East Grinstead Church for a chapel to be consecrated at his Manor of Lavertie; it was for the private use of his mother Isabel during her lifetime, on payment of one bezant a year.

An attempt to find out anything at all about this chapel produced the expected blank: it must, after all, have been built of wood, not stone, and may well have been part of the earlier building which almost certainly once stood on this very site and of which not a trace remains. The search did produce one intriguing by-product, however, one reminder that history is all around us, whether we are aware of it or not. Early in the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) the Guild or Fraternite of St. Catherine's, which had a great hall in East Grinstead, was abolished, presumably as part of the reforming zeal of the Duke of Somerset. The Fraternite had owned much local land, including some of the Manor of Lavertie. An inspection of the 1842 Tithe map revealed three fields above the Medway, just to the left of the drive as you come up to Ashdown. They were called Great, Middle and Little Catherine Land. As part of a general enquiry into how field names and sizes had changed since 1842, my search took me to Simon Waters who farms all the land around the School; much has changed, and those three fields have been amalgamated into one. What was it called? Caispiece.

Patient, scholarly research—not mine—has uncovered the whole complex issue of ownership and tenancy of the estate between the Conquest and the present day, and, for those who are interested, names and dates can be supplied. One single example must be given, though, for it is such a detailed and fascinating description of the estate as it existed in the last decade of the reign of Elizabeth I. It comes from a collection of papers known as the "Buckhurst Terrier" which records the possessions of Sir Thomas Sackville, K. G., Lord Buckhurst, known caustically as "Sack-fill" for his rapacity as a landlord and his desire to acquire yet more land. It was he, though, who built Sackville College, the architectural glory of East Grinstead.

"John Brooker, yeoman, holds by indenture dated the last of Nov., 40 Eliz. (1597-8) for 21 years, first the said manor house of Lavertie, being built with brick, covered with Horsham stone and Shingle, with a brick wall enclosed, and the several court yards, gardens, orchards, closes, rooms, two old dwelling houses, a great barn, a stall stable, hayhouse, dove house, Hemplands etc. . . . (here follows a list of the fields and woods belonging to the estate, some names still current today) . . . the Highams, two pieces of Foxearths and Thistlefield with a little tenement heald with Shingle called Conny Lodge standing upon the Foxearths . . . In all 368 ac. 3r. 8da. 2p. . . of which wood 124 ac. Rent £80 and two fat capons alive Nov. 20. Except and always reserved unto the said Lord Buckhurst his heires and assigns all and singular the Rents of assize, services, wardes, marriages, relief and escheats, Heriots, wayves, estrates, keeping of Courte . . . etc."

There are certainly some interesting remnants of feudalism in the list of exceptions, and the "two fat capons" are hardly what one's landlord expects in rent nowadays; for "a tenement and land called Canserne" up on the ridge-way, the rent was assessed at "twenty-six shillings and eightpence and a spare Hawk or for both twenty-nine shillings at the will of the Lord." Less than a mile to the east lies Lower Parrock, also then owned by Lord Buckhurst but leased out separately. There, in Tudor times, was a forge on a piece of land called the Wake which was producing iron, almost certainly by the new blast furnace process imported from France; the Denization Lists of 1544 state that Frenchmen were working there and living nearby, in Hartfield. We know that both cannon and shot were produced there and it is not at all too fanciful to guess that some of these munitions were used against the Armada in 1588, though there can be no positive proof. A nearby forge was owned by Sir Thomas Bullen, the father of Anne Boleyn.

The presence of so much iron-working in the immediate vicinity must have had its effect on Lavertie, for it seems most probable that coppice wood was supplied from the woods just above us, while iron ore was almost certainly extracted from this estate. Just three hundred yards to our west is a small wood called Minepit Shaw, in the centre of which is a deep hollow. It was, quite coincidentally, on the edge of Minepit Shaw that the two bombs (which were not actually bombs at all, but mines!) were dropped in June 1940, though the story of that incident also belongs to a later chapter.

The Newnham family, also of Maresfield, was the last to hold the estate before it became known as Ashdown House. They purchased it, with five hundred acres of land, in January 1690, and the property was first mortgaged and then the mortgage sold in 1791 by John Newnham in order to fulfil his father's bequest to a sister. The mortgage was transferred to John Trayton Fuller and the fee-simple of the estate was, by Act of Parliament, invested in him shortly afterwards. Immediately the Act had become law, Fuller embarked upon the project of constructing a new and grander house and he enlisted the help of a young and almost untried architect who was soon to make his mark in America. The name of this young architect was Benjamin Henry Latrobe.

Chapter 2

Everyone who has been to Ashdown knows two facts about its construction: it was built by Latrobe, and he was the man who also built the White House in Washington D.C., the home of the President of the United States of America. Both facts, unfortunately, need more than a little qualification, the second one in particular.

Many visitors, having duly admired the elegance and grace of the Southern facade, the ceilings of the portico and the entrance hall, the fine staircase positioned rather curiously against the right-hand wall and the spacious, airy Drawing Room and Library, might well have started wondering when they went upstairs, to the dormitories or to the headmaster's study, how so eminent an architect could have produced such a hotch-potch of a design, with its rabbit-warren of staircases, corridors and tiny rooms. The answer, of course, is quite simple . . . he didn't. He designed the central block, which was constructed in front and just to the east of an existing farmhouse, almost certainly a late Tudor building, dating from the great rebuilding period at the end of the sixteenth century. To this central block there have been numerous additions over the years, ranging from the Victorian wing which used to house the kitchens and is now used for a multitude of purposes, to the "old Gym", a somewhat delapidated hut probably brought down from the Royal Artillery camp up in Ashdown Forest at the end of the First World War, or from the magnificent new Theatre, situated where a huge old barn once stood, to the East Wing erected by Aidan Wallis in the nineteen-thirties. And there is a great deal more.

To return to Latrobe, however, for it is chiefly his building that we think of when we think of Ashdown House, even if in area it now forms substantially less than half of it. Here is an extract from a letter written by a gentleman who travelled America extensively throughout the course of 1804, published in the "Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser" on 28 August, 1805, and sent to the paper by a friend of his who signs himself, anonymously, as "Your Constant Reader."

"In the course of my ramble in the south of England, I had an opportunity of seeing a country seat, built for Mr. Fuller, by your American architect, Latrobe. In London I became intimately acquainted with his brother, a man of so many virtues, of so much learning, and of such brilliant wit, that I cannot help regretting that I accidentally missed the opportunity of knowing the architect during my stay in Philadelphia.

Mr. Fuller's House is evidently the work of a less ripened taste than the Bank of Pennsylvania, for it is a more complicated thing, for a less complicated use; but it is, notwithstanding this, an exquisite morsel, and forcibly called forth all those sensations of delight with which I have so often gazed at your Pennsylvania Bank. With such a building in your country, you may challenge Europe for a model of taste; for I have not seen a single structure in this island nor on the continent which has excited in my mind the same impressions of perfect harmony and consistency of parts. I can only compare it to those beautiful, half-fashionable Quaker girls with which the city abounds, and who, with the Bank, are among the best things in Philadelphia.

I can, indeed, see nothing in Mr. Fuller's house which is not right; the

arrangement is judicious and perfectly convenient; no room is lost; everything is where it should be; and the stair-case and landing above is a picture worthy of Malton's pencil. This may be found elsewhere; but the circular portico is not to be found elsewhere, excepting, perhaps, in Greece. I think, however, the thing is original, for its taste is to me original. The dome is made of Coade's artificial stone, and is covered with Italian marble. It is, by far, the prettiest thing of that manufactory, which has produced so many pretty things. It seems to be of one piece, but consists of more than one hundred stones; each is enriched with a sculptured panel of beautiful design."

And so forth, at even greater length, and including a mention of the other house Latrobe designed in England, Hammerwood, just over two miles to our north, and now, after lengthy restoration, well worth a visit. In his "Architecture of Southern England", John Julius Norwich describes Ashdown as "... a gem of a house . . . all Ionic, feminine grace, while Hammerwood is Doric, stalwart masculinity . . ." Both houses, as his description suggests, are based on classical designs from Ancient Greece, the inspiration for Ashdown's front being drawn from Athens in the fifth century B.C.; for those readers with a special interest in architecture his book is highly recommended, as, for a briefer account is Nikolaus Pevsner's "Sussex", in which he describes our house as "very perfect indeed". He too picks out the staircase and landing in the entrance hall as being of particular interest.

So, who was this Latrobe whose work has been so highly, almost extravagantly praised? He was born in Yorkshire in 1764, was educated both in England and in Saxony, studied engineering as well as architecture, was given the commission to design Hammerwood when he was only twenty-eight years old and Ashdown two years later, emigrated to America the following year, utterly distraught at the death of his young wife in the course of her third confinement, has since been considered the first professional architect in the United States and died of yellow fever in New Orleans where he was supervising their waterworks project in September, 1820. The "Encyclopaedia Britannica" gives more information for those who want it, including the fact that he did much important work in Philadelphia, then the capital of the U.S.A., in Washington, about to become the capital, and in Baltimore, where the Cathedral is considered to be his finest work. In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson appointed him the Surveyor of the Public Buildings of the United States.

He did not build the White House, though. That honour belongs to an Irishman named James Hoban, who was also the man responsible for its rebuilding after British troops had burnt it down in the War of 1812. It is true, though, that Latrobe did do some work on it for Jefferson, adding terraces at the west and east ends and improving on several of the original plans.

Another of the names associated with Ashdown is that of Lord Heathfield. The engraving of Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of his Lordship hangs above the fireplace that faces the visitor on entry, a dormitory is named after him and he is the leading character in our best-known ghost story. Generations of Ashdown children have listened (after lights-out, with the added spice of danger!) to the narrative legend of how, once a year on a certain night in July, his ghostly Lordship is seen once again, revisiting his newly-built mansion. Far away in the distance the rattle of wheels and the jingle of harness can be heard, echoing

around the valley of the Medway, and soon, round a dark curve in the drive, the phantom carriage, dimly lit by flickering lamps, its foaming horses urged furiously forward by a shadowy coachman whose desperate desire it is to bring his stricken master home alive, appears in front of the house. Woe befall those who look upon this fearful sight: death or madness will surely follow.

It's sad to undermine a good ghost story, but this one is even more apocryphal than most. George Augustus Elliott, the first Lord Heathfield and Baron of Gibraltar, actually died "as full of honours as of years" at Aix-La-Chapelle on July 6th, 1790, and there is no record of his ever having even visited the Manor of Lavortye, let alone having lived in a house which was yet to be built! We do know a great deal about his life and career, though, and, since there is a genuine though tenuous connection between the great man and Ashdown, a brief account might not be out of place.

He was "... appointed Governor of Gibraltar in 1775, and at the siege of that place by the combined forces of France and Spain he defended it in a manner which won for him the unqualified approbation of his country. For this command he was excellently fitted by a habit of unremitting vigilance... and a thorough knowledge of fortification and gunnery. He had, moreover, accustomed himself to a mode of life which rendered him superior to all the inconveniences and privations that can occur in a besieged fortress. No eminent man of his time equalled him in sobriety and disregard of animal gratifications. His food consisted solely of vegetables; his drink of water; he never slept for more than four hours at a time and thus was a personal witness of the performance of garrison duties at those hours when most commanders depend on other eyes than their own..." On his return from the successful defence of the Rock of Gibraltar, over a period of four years, he was loaded with honours and prize-money, some of which may well have been employed in the purchase of Lavortye. A story exists that he was actually intending to place "... a lady-friend of his acquaintance" in the house he may well have been planning to buy, but there is absolutely no proof of this rather libellous tale.

All that we know for certain is that his daughter, Anne, was married to John Trayton Fuller and spent at least some of her time in the newly-built and newly-named mansion of Ashdown. One of her sons was christened Augustus Elliott Fuller in honour of his illustrious grandfather, and it was he who was registered as the owner when the 1842 Tithe map was drawn up.

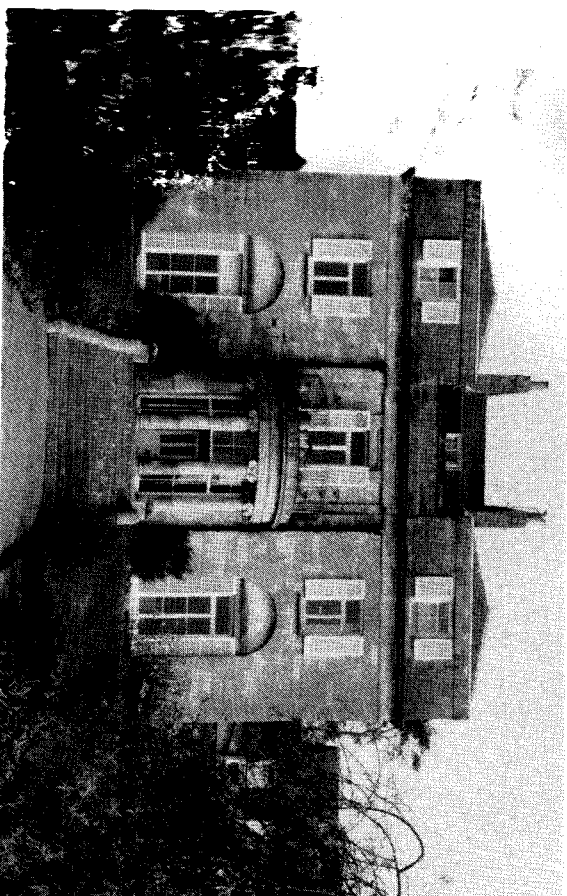
It is possible to ascribe a reasonably accurate date to the Latrobe building? There are two pieces of evidence which suggest that we can place it with some precision as being 1794. In the first place it seems highly improbable that any building work took place before the Act of Parliament that would allow Fuller to leave the estate to his heirs, and that was not passed until 1793. Latrobe left for America in 1795 and had presumably finished work by then. The second piece of evidence is from the cropping records and rough maps drawn up by Martin Hoath, who managed the estate for Fuller over a period of years. The map of 1793 shows a square-on, rectangular building consistent with the Tudor farmhouse, while that of 1794 shows the portico that we know so well: even allowing for the roughness of the sketches, the evidence seems conclusive.

And so to the Fuller family, who were to live at Ashdown on and off for the next seventy years and were to own the increasingly large estate until it was finally

broken up in 1910. The County Record Office in Lewes has a fascinating assortment of documents known collectively as the Rose Fuller papers. They include such things as a letter from a slave who had been granted his freedom and was begging for a small plot of land to till—the family had owned plantations and slaves in Jamaica in the eighteenth century—an election broadsheet and minutely detailed election expenses for A. E. Fuller's campaign to be returned as Member of Parliament for Lewes; the correspondence over the issue of whether the railway should be allowed to run through Ashdown land and what price should be paid; the Act of 33 George III, by which the estate became theirs to pass on, and the inventory of taxable possessions liable for "legacy duty" in 1857. This inventory actually named individual books in the Library, as well as itemising every stick of furniture and the contents of the wine cellar and the brew-house.

John Trayton Fuller was decended on his father's side from the notable Fuller family of Brightling and on his mother's from the Traytons, owners of the Manor of Chalvington and lawyers of Lewes over several generations, and his already considerable wealth must have been much augmented by his marriage to the daughter of Lord Heathfield, Anne Elliot, in 1776. When John died in 1814, after a twenty years occupation of Ashdown, he left the estate to his wife, who survived him for a further twenty-two years. In his will he dictated that his burial was to be conducted at the least possible expense, the coffin to be plain oak or elm, and sent to Chalvington with a pair of horses and two servants on horseback.

On Anne's death in 1836 the estate was inherited by her son Augustus who had, only two years previously, also inherited the Rosehill estate at Brightling from his famously eccentric cousin, "Mad Jack" Fuller. He had earned his nickname by his penchant for building the most extravagant collection of



Latrobe's House: still as he designed it

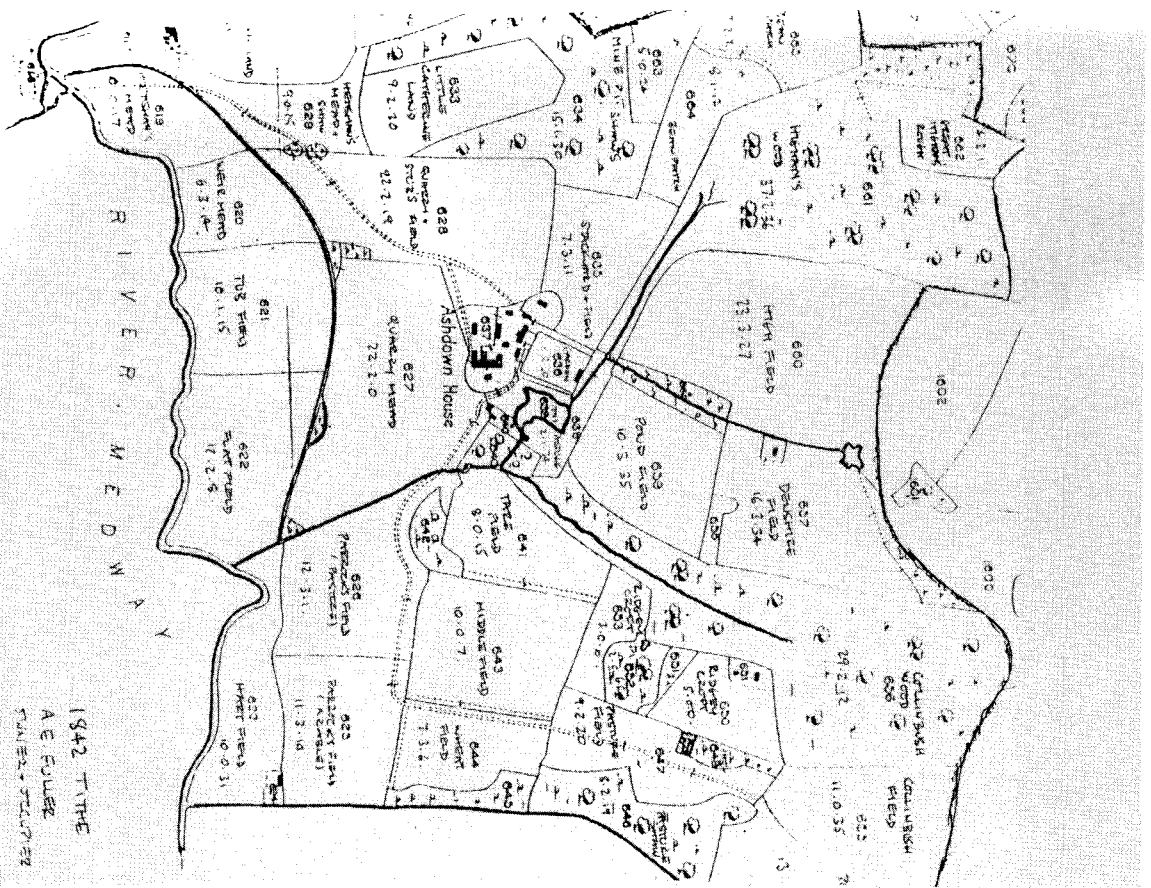
"fancies and follies", of which probably the most famous is the Sugar Loaf at Dallington. The story goes that one night, in the course of a particularly rowdy party, he wagered that the spire of Dallington church could be seen from his house. On finding that it could not, he promptly had a look-alike put up! He also built the Needle, a forty foot obelisk on the top of Brightling Beacon, a temple and another tower. He was buried under an twenty five foot high pyramid in Brightling churchyard, and the story went that he was interred sitting at a table, a glass of port in his hand and a bottle at his side. Unfortunately, if predictably, when the mausoleum was opened in 1983, it was found to be empty.

Augustus Elliott Fuller, therefore, was able to divide his time between two fine estates, and a comparison of the contents and value of the two in 1857 suggests that he probably spent a greater portion of the year at Brightling. An estate, like a school, does not depend on just one man, however, and day to day life went on as usual as Ashdown whether the owners were there or not. We get a very full picture of working life during the first twenty years of the Fuller period from the cropping records already referred to; all the fields are drawn for each year described, the crops and manuring of arable, pasture and meadow noted down, and the woods carefully shaded to show the felling which has taken place. Thus, for example, the records for 1793 show that fifty-five acres of grass were mown . . . the area, that is, of over one hundred full-size football pitches, and all of it mown by men with scythes. The bill for labour that year amounted to £600, probably representing about two dozen workers. In the following year the corn crop was sold for £488-18-0, while in the house twenty-five young mutton valued at £75 were consumed, along with cheese, butter, cream and poultry to the value of £100. Bills of Sale from Croombridge Fair are also included, so that we learn that in 1797 a "small red cow" fetched £10-16-0 and "Neal's Old Cow" fetched £21.

The Speenhamland Poor Law of 1795, whereby wages rose or fell according to the price of bread, brought great suffering to many farm labourers and their families, and by 1814 there were a sixty per cent pauperage rate in the parish of East Grinstead of which Ashdown House was then a part. Things did gradually improve over the course of the century, though with the size of families in those days it can never have been very easy to cope.

One family may serve as an example. Taken from the Censuses of 1841 and 1851 respectively are lists of the occupants of Keeper's Cottage on the edge of Collingbush Wood. If you take the farm road below the "Jungle" and follow the concrete track up the hill you can still make out the site to this day. The cottage itself survived until the 1930s, and even then had no amenities, water having to be carried from a spring some distance away.

In the 1841 Census we have: William Bowrah, 38, gamekeeper; Elizabeth, 36; Ann, 15; Jesse, 13; William, 10; Esther, 9; George, 7; Eliza, 5; John, 4; Henry 11 months . . . and those were only the children who had survived. The Census of 1851 tells us that William and Elizabeth were still resident, with Ann, 24, a dressmaker, Jesse, 22 and ill at the time, a labourer, as was William the younger, now 19, and George, aged 17. John, a thirteen year old, was a farm boy and there is a little girl of six, Emily, who is listed as "scholar". Hard times indeed, for ordinary working folk who passed their lives less than a mile away from the great house.



Fields and averages in Fuller's time. There have been few changes

Chapter 3

And so, at last, to a school... but not yet to Ashdown House, which was still over forty years in the future. It was in the summer of 1843 that a gentleman named William Randall Lee opened an establishment for the sons of gentlemen at Number Eight, Norfolk Terrace, Brighton, an establishment that was going to become known officially as Connaught House, though that name seems to have been used only in the first ten years of the School's existence, and unofficially as "the House of Lords", for reasons that will become apparent.

What sort of an institution was this, in the days when preparatory schools, as such, were almost unknown? The dozen or so great public schools, after all, were used to accepting boys as young as eight years old, and keeping them up to the age of nineteen in some cases. Change was in the air, however, and the inquiries of the old system were no longer quite so acceptable to the new Victorian way of thinking.

In some ways Connaught House fulfilled a function that was not so very different from the function that we fulfill today: many of the children did come at the age of seven or eight and many of them stayed four or five years. Indeed, in that first entry of 1843, alongside such illustrious names as the Earl of Denbigh and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, is the name of Lovick Emilius Cooper, son of the Rev. Lovick Cooper. He was born in November 1837, arrived at Connaught House in September 1843 at the tender age of five years and ten months and left in December 1850 as, we can only hope, a strapping thirteen year old.

Others appear to have used the school more as a "crammer". As we see from the entry list for the first six months of 1859, four of the ten children were destined to stay for less than two years, though we do not know, in their cases, just how old they were. Entry-books, in the immaculate copperplate hand of William Randall Lee, still survive for the years 1843 and 1852, and for 1855 to 1864, but while the former gave dates of birth but no "destination", in the latter that information is reversed.

A visit to Numbers Eight and Nine, Norfolk Terrace (for Number Nine was taken over as well, some time between the Censuses of 1861 and 1871) revealed them to be tall, elegant buildings set three hundred yards or so above the sea-front and with a splendid view due south and downhill towards it. We may imagine that the children went down regularly to the sea: there is, in fact, a narrow alley less than five feet wide running from very close to the terrace to within fifty yards of the beach, which would have been an obvious route for the boys to use. The two houses today are, almost inevitably, blocks of luxury flats. There are only four in Number Nine, a very narrow building that looks as if it was an "in-fill", but Number Eight has ten or more.

Entries in the Brighton Record Office show that between 1886 and 1915 the buildings were used briefly by three more schools, the last of which was a now defunct girl's secondary school, then used for billeting officers during the First World War and subsequently turned into flats whose ownership has changed hands many times.

As the sample entry page clearly shows, the school's sobriquet of the "House of Lords" was well justified: many parents were clearly attracted by the social exclusivity of the establishment, and the final page of entries that we still

			Entered	Left	Destination
80	Campbell, Montagu	Sons of The Earl Howe	Jan 1859	April 1860	Eton
81	Calcutt, Lord	The Lady Mary Vaul	Jan 1859	Sept. 1860	Eton
82	Calcutt, Lord	Mrs. John Bisset in name of Watford	Jan 1859	Sept. 1862	Marrow
83	Gen. Somerset, Lord	The Duke of Beaufort	May 1859	March 1863	Eton
84	Sturton, Hon. Henry	Lord Donningborough	May 1859	Dec. 1862	Priv. School
85	Parker, Hon. Algernon	Earl of Maclesfield	May 1859	July 1862	Eton
86	Boswell, Willmetts	Sir Geo. Houston Boswell Bt.	May 1859	Nov. 1860	Tutor
87	Murray, Hon. D. O.	Lord Elphinstone	May 1859	July 1860	Navy
88	Gen. Lloyd, James	Colonel Cav. Lloyd	May 1859	Mar. 1863	Eton
89	Myvill, Marmaduke	M. Myvill Esq. M. P.	May 1859	July 1862	Eton

have, that for September 1864, has twenty-two names upon it, from which it is possible to deduce that there were somewhere between seventy and eighty boys in residence. Nor was it only the English aristocracy that was so attracted, for at the very head of the testimonial sent to William Randall Lee from Ashdown House in December 1886 comes the name of "S.A.R. il Duca di Genova", followed, it is true, by a brace of Marquises and a covey of belted Earls.

To the really knowledgeable expert on the nineteenth century these two, battered entry-books might well provide a wealth of interesting material; even to the thoroughly amateur historian some names are enough to send one hurrying to the Biographical Dictionary in an attempt to discover more. There was Edward Stanhope, for example, son of the noted historian and himself Secretary for War from 1887 to 1892; he it was who adopted the magazine rifle for use by the British Army, as well as making a much-needed start to the reform of military administration. Another Edward, Bulwer-Lytton this time, was a poet, diplomat and statesman in his own right, as well as being the son of one of the most popular writers of the Victorian age.

There were four Cecils, sons of Lord Burleigh and direct descendants of William Cecil, the great servant of the first Elizabeth. It even seemed possible that it was one of them who, as Lord Salisbury, became one of the outstanding Conservative Prime Ministers of the nineteenth century, but he, in fact, turned out to be their first cousin. And then there were other names that tantalised the memory: a boy called Spring-Rice came in 1864. Was he the older brother of the author of "I Vow to Thee, My Country", and did his brother Arthur follow him there? And Richard Harpur-Crewe made the long trek down from Calke Abbey in Derbyshire, that fascinating house recently purchased by the National Trust chiefly because, thanks to the eccentricities of the Harpur-Crewe family, it is a virtual "time-capsule", with many rooms unchanged for over a hundred years.

But what, you might now quite reasonably be asking, has this got to do with Ashdown House? Well, William Randall Lee, the back of whose venerable head provides an interesting example of Victorian photography, married in April 1852 and fathered eight children, seven sons and one daughter. Six of them were born in the first seven years of the marriage while the last child came as something of an afterthought in 1875! The eldest son, also William Randall, was born in January 1853 and the third son, Francis Archer, in April 1855.

When, in 1886, their father finally decided to retire, these two decided to set up a school on their own and leased Ashdown House from Miss Clara Tapps Gervis, the grand-daughter of Augustus Fuller, who owned the entire estate until her death in 1910. We know very little indeed about the Lees; their births are recorded in the family Bible, and their deaths in the Parish register of Forest Row, but in between there is almost nothing. We may conjecture that they helped their father at Norfolk Terrace; certainly it was from Norfolk Terrace that the first sixteen boys arrived at Ashdown in September, 1886.

Most of those of you who read this history will be aware that the School celebrated its centenary five years ago and it is an intriguing thought that the junketing came, almost certainly, just forty-three years too late! The link between the two schools is so strong as to make them in fact really one: not just the Lee connection but the fact that all our first pupils came directly from the Brighton school and the more telling fact still that parents at Ashdown were former pupils

at Numbers Eight and Nine, Norfolk Terrace. January, 1862, for example, saw the arrival of the Hon. Francis Cecil at the Brighton establishment, while January 1888 saw the arrival of his son here.

One of these first sixteen pupils comes to life for us. About five years ago the headmaster received a letter from a gentleman named Richard Beaumont whose father, Dudley John Beaumont, arrived here as one of those first sixteen. Enclosed with the letter were pictures of young Dudley with his sisters, dated August, 1886, Dudley as a page in attendance on Queen Victoria, and a letter he

Dear Mr. Sec,

Several of your past pupils at Norfolk Terrace Brighton whose names are given below feel that they cannot allow the occasion of your retirement from School work to pass without some expression of sorrow and regret that, owing to advanced years, you are compelled to take that step. Would they know that the testimony of your conscience to duties faithfully performed will be your highest satisfaction and chief reward, yet at the same time they feel it both a duty and a pleasure to testify that they are not inconsiderable

Ashdown House,

Forest Row

14th December, 1886

My dear Mother,

I hope you

are better.

Will you please have

my Progen Book sent
on to me.

There is one new boy
we called Miller.

Please ask Betty

to look after my

bird.

Will you please also

send me my request.

I arrived here quite

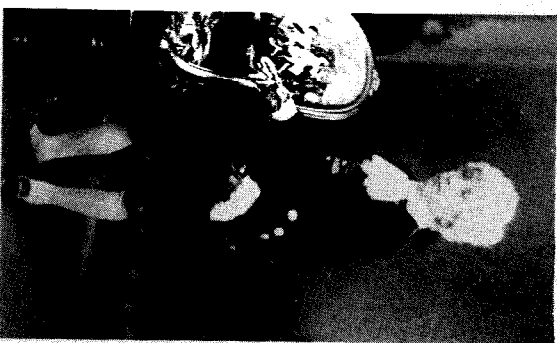
safely.

With best love to you all

I am,

Your loving son,

Dudley John Beaumont



wrote home in his first term, all reproduced here. Dudley served in the 1st Gloucestershire Regiment throughout the First World War, only to die in November 1918 when his son was just three years old. He married Sibyl Mary, daughter of Seigneur of Sark, who survived her husband for nearly fifty years, dying in 1974, and widely known as the famous Dame of Sark.

These two Lee brothers, then, set up house at Ashdown in 1886. They were both in their early thirties, and seem to have shared a passion for golf; they were both instrumental in the foundation of the Royal Ashdown Golf Club just two years after their arrival, the young William Randall Lee helped found the Ladies' Club a few years later. For very many years Ashdown boys have caddied for the lady golfers once or twice a season, and been suitably rewarded for their efforts.

At the end of their first term here a testimonial was presented to their father, the first page of which is reproduced. It continues "... of the unwearied anxiety and care which you always showed for their welfare. They have commissioned me to forward you the enclosed cheque for £300 which they ask you to accept as a small proof of their gratitude and as some mark of their appreciation of the assistance they received from you in bygone years. They also beg me to convey to you their best wishes for your present and future welfare and to express their earnest hope that at the end of so many years of continual toil you may be enabled to enjoy as well earned rest. I am, dear Mr. Lee, yours etc..." A wordy lot, our forefathers! The signatories to this document read like a roll-call of Debreit or "Who's Who" and we can feel assured that the old man was suitably delighted.

Sources of information for the ensuing twenty years are desperately scarce. We have the shabby old boards that record the Head Boys from 1886 onwards, a list of whose names appears in the Appendices, and the entrants for R. N. C. Dartmouth, R. N. C. Osborne and H. M. S. Britannia. One of these entrants, by the way, for Britannia in 1889, is another of those first sixteen—his name was Neville Shute. Can there possibly be some connection between him and Neville Shute (Norway), the novelist whose books are still so popular today? The names are certainly far from common.

Two documents only survive from this period, one of them a flimsy eight page publication entitled the "Ashdown Chronicle". It shares with most of its predecessors an absorption with sport: fully half of it deals with the fortunes of the 1889 cricket team, including "Characters of the Eleven" and this fascinating if not very confidence-inspiring list of the batting averages of the top eight players. Over the averages of the rest a veil is suitably and decently drawn.

	Runs	Number of innings	Biggest score	Average
J. Hawes	289	29	26	9 28/29
F. Williams	139	14	29	9 13/14
G. Hawes	243	27	25	9
F. Moore	185	23	36	8 1/13
F. Browning	176	24	35	7 1/3
F. Andrews	164	25	28	6 14/15
Mr R. Palmer	106	22	25	5 8/11
A. Henry	106	23	12	4 14/23

A "handsome presentation bat was awarded to Hawes Major . . . who had borne the brunt of the whole battle". The teams against which the XI played were "Mr. Meyrick's from Grange Road and Mr. Bayly's from Wallingham. The former team was composed of boys bigger and older than ourselves, and this gives considerable excuse for the licking they gave us; about our match with the latter team, we cannot consider speech silver, but silence is certainly golden."

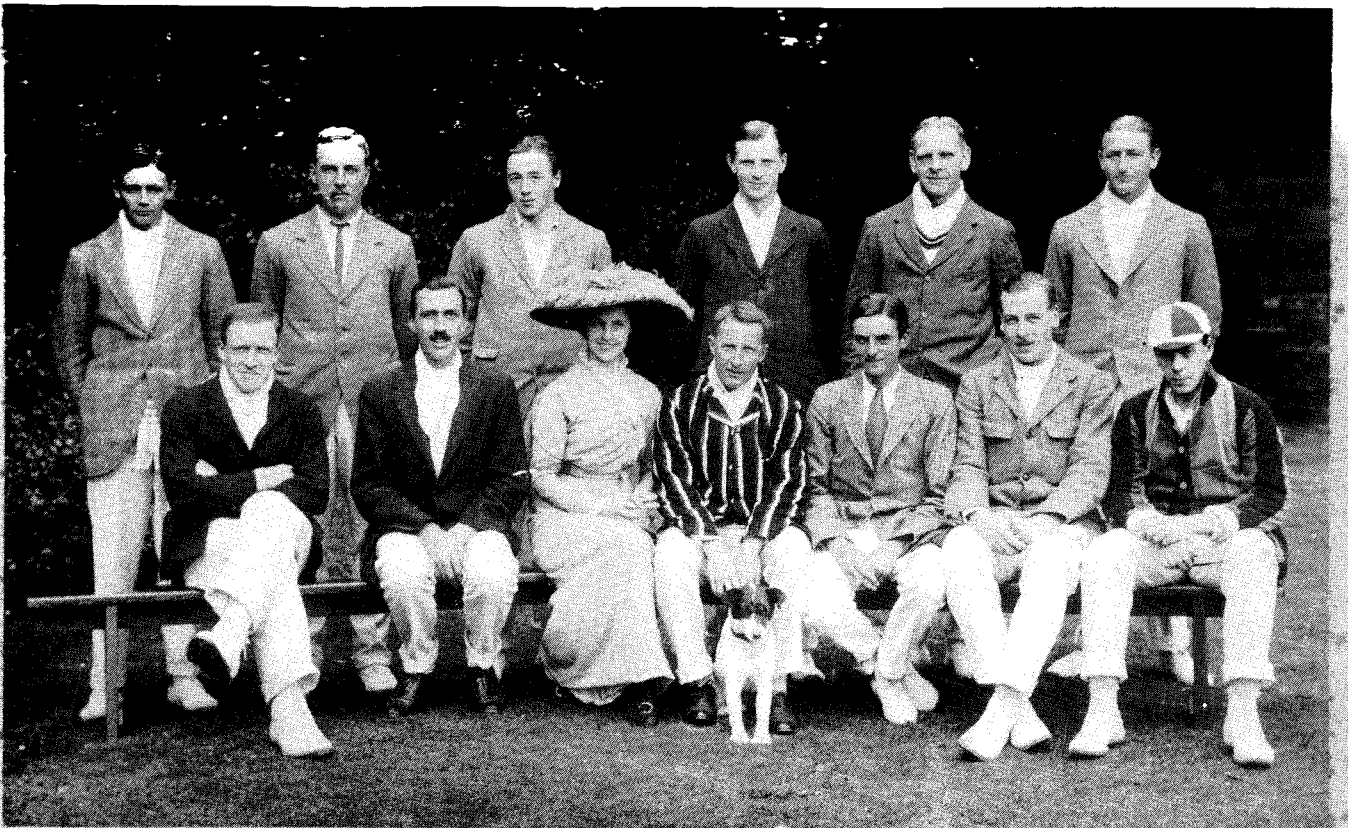
Other items of interest from this first "Chronicle" include the award of colours to all "Old Leites", the ribbon being of dark green edged with salmon on one side and yellow on the other (rather more garish than the light blue or dark blue of today!), a reference to a previous and similar publication twenty months before, news of Old Boys, and the Summer Prize List. There is reference to golf on the new "Ashdown Forest and Tunbridge Wells" course and details of a Racquets tournament and, on a more intimate note, this paragraph: "Herbert, the faithful hound whose death we all deplored, has found a not unworthy successor in the redoubtable Rosa. Further additions to the Menagerie are a Jay, a Peacock, a Parrot and a Pug."

The other document is an alphabetical list of entries from 1886 to the end of the Second World War, accompanied in many cases by a brief account of the boy's subsequent career. At the back of the book is a record of the football seasons from 1889 to 1895. The match in March 1890 "afforded particular interest from the fact that it happened to be the first occasion that Ashdown House has won a foot-ball match . . . sending the ball through the posts three times". There is also a printed card of the Athletic Sports two years later, in which such events as the Broad Jump and the Half-Mile were witnessed " . . . by a goodly array of Old Boys".

Francis Archer Lee died in 1898 at the early age of forty-two. His brother continued alone for the next seven years, a period about which there is not a scrap of information, except for some entry lists which give no more information than names and addresses. All we can estimate from these is that the average size of the School at this time was not much more than thirty or so, and that the numbers were gradually declining.

In 1905 however, he was joined by a junior partner, a schoolmaster named Arthur Evill who married Kathleen Lee, a grand-daughter of the first William Randall Lee and niece of the two brothers. A further five years later, in 1910, William Randall Lee the younger retired to a house called "The Nook" in Forest Row, where, eight years later, he died aged sixty-five.

From 1910 onwards Arthur and Kathleen Evill were in sole charge and from now on a very great deal more is known. In particular, as the next chapter will show, we are lucky enough to have direct testimony from former pupils who remember the Evills, and Ashdown House between the two World Wars, with considerable clarity.



O. A. March. July 3rd. 1913.

Arthur and Kathleen Evill flanked by their O.A. team

Chapter 4

"To have raised the numbers from twelve to fifty-seven . . . is an achievement of which you may both well be proud . . ." runs the embossed testimonial to Arthur and Kathleen Evill, a reproduction of which appears close by. Certainly if the numbers had declined to only twelve when the Evills took over, there was plenty to build on, for to have so few pupils in a school, even in those days, heralded decline and then collapse. We can only guess that William Randall Lee the younger was no longer quite so interested in his school: ill-health may have played a part, or outside interests; it is all conjecture. What we do know is that from 1910 onwards the fortunes of the school once more started to rise.

If our knowledge of this period depended solely upon the termly "Chronicle", a rather flimsy publication whose light-blue cover was adorned with the head of the Ashdown stag, it would centre on two main themes: the fortunes of O.A.s, whether still at school or in the wider world, and the perennial fascination with sport, to which much of each edition is devoted. Our chief source, however, is the memory of those who were here at the time. This chapter consists almost entirely of their absorbing reminiscences. It has been necessary to do some light editing, chiefly to avoid duplication, but just occasionally for other reasons. There are omissions from the original manuscripts, but otherwise the words are entirely those of their authors.

This first memoir is written by Captain Ivan Sarell, late of the Royal Navy, who came to Ashdown in May 1918 and left in July 1922, when his recollection is that there were about forty boys in the school.

"Kathleen and Arthur Evill were strongly contrasting personalities. She was personally most attractive, gentle and affectionate; he was a gifted teacher in that, for me at least, he inspired a keen interest in the subject he was teaching. He had, however, a violent temper which he made not the slightest attempt to control. He used physically to attack those unfortunate pupils who failed to meet his expectations. I remember him seizing one boy by the hair and beating his head against the blackboard while bellowing: "I CAST MY PEARLS BEFORE SWINE!"; each word being emphasised with a crash on the board. He engendered an intensely competitive spirit in the school and it was indeed the case of the devil take the hindmost. Beatings, on the other hand, were infrequent. The usual punishment was to be required to calculate the cube of a series of four-figure numbers; at least this cultivated numerical accuracy.

We wore tweed jackets and shorts in winter and grey flannel jackets and shorts in summer. On Sundays we appeared in Eton jackets, trousers and top hats in winter, and grey flannel suits with straw boaters in summer. The boaters were adorned with a ribbon in the school colours—dark blue and light blue.

At the end of the War and in the early post-war years the quality of the staff left a good deal to be desired. I remember particularly a dreadful young cleric who suffered from acne. He pushed at me, on a ddy at the beginning of term, a volume of the complete works of Virgil. Opening it at page one he said: "Learn that!", to which I replied weakly: "Please, sir, what does it mean?" to which he replied: "Don't argue! Learn it!" I succeeded in learning four lines in one term without, however, finding out what it meant. I still remember line 1: "Tityre tu . . ." et cetera. I was about ten at the time. Things improved when demobilisation



Parents of
Past and Present

Ashdown boys, O.A.s, Past and Present Members of the Staff, wish to record our appreciation of your services during the past TWENTY-NINE YEARS.

Go have raised the numbers of the school from twelve to fifty-seven, to leave the school full to capacity and with a high reputation as a training ground for "Knowledge, Manliness and Good Manners"

is an achievement of which you may both well be proud, and