

Taking it on the Chin

managers and old boys of the Eton Manor Clubs write from the First World War front

Leyton & Leytonstone Historical Society

extracts chosen and edited by David Boote
from

‘Chin-Wag
being the War Records of the Eton Manor
Clubs 1914-1918’

edited by Anthony Crossley with illustrations
by F H Townsend

including a brief history of the Eton Manor
Clubs up to the present day

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To the extent that the historical summary of the Clubs on the following pages is original work, rather than repeating facts or based on the research of others, it has been written by David Boote, who gives permission for it to be copied on strict condition that this sentence be included in any copy including subsequent copies made by anyone. Email David at david_boote@yahoo.com for the latest version.

Foreword

Written in 2007 by then Councillor Patrick Smith
Higham Hill Ward, London Borough of Waltham Forest
and member of the Eton Manor Athletics Club

I was moved, when I read 'The Chin Wag' letters, by the tremendous sense of patriotic duty of the writers of the accounts of their life in the trenches and their dry bluff humour, in the face of being blown off God's earth in the worst battlegrounds of World War One. Rupert Brooke, sums up the atmosphere in 'Dawn' :

'With Lips that fade and human laughter,
And faces individual,
Well this side of Paradise! ...
There's little comfort in the wise'

In founding the original Eton College Boys Club in 1907 Gerald Wellesley, at the age of 22 years, chose to do what is arguably as noble a deed as his illustrious grandfather the Duke of Wellington, victor of Napoleon. This says a great deal for how Gerald saw his life at a time of great licence for the aristocracy.

Alfred Wagg not only sent replies to every single serviceman he received from in the World War One trenches, under the guise of 'Chin Wag' but also he sent food parcels, rather like concerned wives and mothers are sending food parcels to their loved ones in Iraq and Afghanistan, today. The Alfred Wagg role in the 'Chin Wag' letters goes beyond common humanity but echoes that deep sense of belief in mankind to which few aspire (but I think today of the Reverend Raymond Draper at St John's Church, Leytonstone, and the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres). This Eton Manor Club membership mentality and loyalty bonding started in the Edwardian period and is completely in apposition to the late Victorians. Wagg in my view is a Saint in his love for his fellow man and his lot in the trenches and should stand alongside the great philanthropists such as Elizabeth Fry, Octavia Hill, Josephine Butler, Joseph Rowntree and Arnold Toynbee – and John Profumo who determined to redeem his soul at Toynbee Hall, as a result of one apparent sexual transgression with Christine Keeler in 1963 which forced him to resign as Secretary of State for War.

In my view Major Villiers was a beacon of virtue and product of his time. He greatly nurtured all of Eton Manorites throughout his life and even stayed and lived at the 'Wilderness' throughout the Blitz : he was a survivor of the First World War.

When I joined Eton Manor A.C. in Leyton in August 1996, I was first struck by the 'camaraderie' that existed amongst members, that clearly resonated with that same Manor spirit which had been carried with them around the world since 1907. The custodians and givers of this 'spirit' are those elder Club Members who remember being touched by the paternalism and humanity and love of sport and a positive life force ethos, inculcated in them by Major Arthur Child Villiers and those touched by the common humanity of Arthur [Alfred] Wagg and the other Etonians.

I commend this account of Eton Manor to all, but particularly to the members of the Association and of the athletics and sports clubs which continue still.

Patrick Smith

David Boote would like to record his gratitude to :

Dr Graham Gould who scanned the entirety of the book 'Chin-Wag being the War Records of the Eton Manor Clubs 1914-1918 edited by Anthony Crossley with Eight Illustrations by the Late F H Townsend', extracts from which are reprinted here, as are cartoons included in the book;

Fred Spencer, Secretary of the Eton Manor Association, who very patiently provided by phone a beginner's guide to the history of the Clubs, and the interest that has been shown recently by a number of people and organisations;

Councillor Patrick Smith who inspired Leyton & Leytonstone Historical Society to prepare and publish this (though it does not come close to fulfilling Patrick's vision); and

David Ian Chapman who shared a few of his many vivid memories of the Clubs.

Michelle Johansen and her colleagues in the wonderful 'Up The Manor!' Project in which pupils at George Mitchell School, Leyton, under the guidance of Michelle Johansen and head of history Martin Spafford recorded memories of the Clubs and published the results.

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The documentary and photographic archives of the Eton Manor Clubs are now held by the Bishopsgate Institute. It will be possible to write a more accurate and detailed account of the Clubs than the short summary that follows in this publication.

There are idealists in every age, and this publication is about that kind of person.

Background

London seemed to grow faster and faster in the 19th century. Street after street was built with compact houses. Britain was a wealthy country but its population was expanding and many lacked regular employment. The welfare state did not exist. Those who had a disability, fell ill, or were simply unable buy enough food could find shelter and meals at the workhouse, but life there was deliberately made unpleasant. Taxpayers were only prepared to support the truly desperate. The typical Victorian did have a strong conscience. Many charities were created and well funded. But those who had money were not going to encourage the unscrupulous to take advantage of their charity. The challenge was to distinguish between those who deserved help and those who did not.

The East End of London had become notorious for its slums but the Eton Manor Clubs started in a different area, Hackney Wick : newly built in the closing decades of the 19th century as regular streets and house plots, with local industry and easy access to other types of employment. The thoughtful were as concerned about such new residential developments as they were about ramshackle slums.

In his 'Maps Descriptive of London Poverty 1898-99' Charles Booth marked some streets in Hackney Wick as 'Very poor, casual. Chronic want'. It was in this area that the leading public school Eton College established a Mission in 1880, slowly building the Mission Church of St Mary (designed by Bodley & Garner and judged by Nikolaus Pevsner "well worth a special visit").



the Mission Church of St Mary

Hackney Wick was only to be an ecclesiastical parish between 1893 and 1953* but the church survives in a parish combined with that of St Augustine.

Eton College's Mission in Hackney Wick started in 1880 and the Boys' Club was established in the first year.

* Vision of Britain website

The precedents for a Mission Boys' Club :

The Education Act of 1870 ('Forster's') laid the basis for schools to be run by local authorities rather than churches and charities. The attention of the 'voluntary sector', as we would now call it, moved to youngsters, particularly boys, from the age of 14, at work if they wanted it and could get it, but who could still benefit from adult guidance. From 1878 the St Andrew's Home and Club for Working-boys, supported by banking families, operated as an evening club for boys in the Soho area. In 1885 it moved to Great Peter Street, Westminster. It was Anglo-Catholic. It bought a boat for 8 oars. There were Whitsun and August Bank Holiday camping weekends at Sunbury and Hayling Island respectively. From July 1883 there was a Club magazine 'The Chronicle: a Monthly Record of St Andrew's Homes and Club'. The first recorded football match of boys' clubs took place in 1875 when St Andrew's played the Hanover Club. Cricket was played from 1879. In 1886 St Andrew's defeated the Eton Mission at cricket. By 1890 football was St Andrew's most popular sport. Running and swimming were added, swimming being the enthusiasm of EMS Pilkington who shared his time for a while with the Eton Mission but abandoned it as too clerical and religious.

A Boys' Club was started in 1878 in Camberwell as part of an Anglo-Catholic Mission District in an area rapidly being built over and containing great poverty. A bagatelle table, tea, coffee and bread and butter were provided. Middle class boys had to be catered for in a separate Institute for Boys and Youths with classes, reading room and lending library. Cyprus was the name given to the Boys' Club by 1878, which with no discernible local connection may be a tribute to the Prime Minister Lord Beaconsfield's achievements at the 1878 Congress of Berlin and in getting Cyprus from Turkey. By 1882 the Club offered horizontal bar gymnastics and boxing.

Walsham How was appointed Bishop of Bedford in 1879 but with responsibility for East London. He encouraged Public School and College Missions, notably the Eton Mission.

The Rev William Carter, the first person appointed to run the Eton Mission, set up the first Public School Boys' Club in London, "avowedly a Rough Boys' Club". One curate organised cricket and football in Victoria Park. EMS Pilkington developed rowing on the Lea, but concentrated on the Selwyn Club, "a younger and politer membership of choir and Sunday-school boys". Swimming lessons took place in the Hackney Cut at 4am (in the summer)*.

Another East London Mission

Toynbee Hall opened in 1884 as the creation of a Church of England curate Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta. "The concept to bring upper and middle class students into lower class neighbourhoods, not only to provide education and social aid, but to actually live and work together with their inhabitants, soon inspired a worldwide movement of university settlements. ...Toynbee Hall attracted many students, especially from Wadham College and Balliol College where Toynbee had taught."†

* 'Making men : the history of boys' clubs and related movements in Great Britain' by Waldo McGillycuddy Eagar, 1953}

† Wikipedia

The motivation for boys' clubs concentrating on sport :

Octavia Hill, active in south London philanthropy, advocated Cadet Corps as invaluable training for London boys. She thought the Volunteer Movement "the surest shield against the aggressiveness of nations with standing armies"

From 1900 the Church of England was losing faith in Clubs. They did not increase church attendance and the Church not so strongly convinced of the moral and spiritual value of games. 'Studies of Boy Life in our Cities' was published in 1904 under the auspices of the Toynbee Trust. This helped bring about Royal Commission reports, legislation on child labour etc. Many books, pamphlets and articles were published on the subject. Physical and moral degeneracy of the young poor was feared. At the time of 'Studies of Boy Life in our Cities' was written, there were about 50 boys' clubs in London, with combined membership 10,000 at most. Parish clubs were seen by the authors as a mere ploy to get boys to services and Bible classes. Boys' clubs were ejecting unruly boys. Having established order, they attracted as members boys from settled homes, and so of a higher social class. The editor Urwick saw 'loafers' as the main evil. The authors assumed the products of a public school education had something to give working class boys. Self-government was not admired in boys' clubs. Urwick favoured compulsory education at evening schools, not believing an increase in the school leaving age was practicable.

Britain found in the Boer War 1899–1902 that 38% were physically unfit to serve in the forces, a third of children were under-nourished, and working class boys of 12 were an average 5 inches shorter than those in fee-paying schools.

The Eton Manor Boys' Clubs concentrated on athleticism which was seen by some (but not Wellesley) as alienating the poorest and toughest types of boys.*

Eton Mission organised a Federation of the London Boys' Clubs which encouraged competition between the Clubs.

The Boys' Brigades were started in Glasgow in 1883 as a more lively alternative to Sunday-school, but still restricted to churchgoers. Lord Baden-Powell founded the Scouting movement in 1907, offering a similar range of sporting and leisure activities for young males. The Boys' Brigades always emphasised 'drill', whereas in the Army Baden-Powell had wanted, in his words, "intelligent young fellows who could use their wits and had not been drilled into being soul-less machines, only able to act under direct orders". Though Baden-Powell valued religion, Scouting was independent of the churches. It was more congenial to High Anglicans than the Boys' Brigades. Serving in South Africa Baden-Powell expressed concern that Britain was weak nationally, that education concentrated in individual success and security rather than service for others, that political parties and religious sects operated against national unity. Scouting was to be playful but with a serious patriotic purpose.



* Making men : the history of boys' clubs and related movements in Great Britain' by Waldo McGillycuddy Eagar, 1953

From Mission to mission

In 1907 Gerald Wellesley aged 22, a grandson of the Duke of Wellington, went to assist in running the Boys Club at Eton College's Mission in Hackney Wick started in or soon after 1880. He soon distanced the Club from the Church by setting up in 1909 an Old Boys' Club independent of the Mission. Wellesley proudly states "From that moment onwards, can be dated the growth and success of our present Clubs". Youngsters could join the Mission Boys' Club from the age of 14 (the usual age for finishing school and starting work) to 16. They had to leave when they became 18, but they could then transfer to Wellesley's Old Boys' Club, for which he initially found premises at the corner of Daintry Street.

Wellesley wrote in 1909 : "The Boys' Club, which is only one of our many institutions for lads in Hackney Wick, is run for the very roughest class of working boy, and as we look back on the past twelve months, though we have at the same time every reason to be satisfied with the progress made, yet we find ourselves face to face with the danger that our Club may become so respectable as to keep away the ragged street-arab, with whom we try so hard to keep in touch. It is not so much that the appearance of the boys themselves has altered in any appreciable degree, as that an atmosphere of order and self-respect has grown up in the Club." In other words, Wellesley was taking into the Club boys who would not have been regarded as deserving help. In December 1909 Wellesley saw the rival temptations to the Club as drinking, gambling and 'street-loafing'.

By 1911 the strength of the Boys' and Old Boys' Clubs was sufficient for Gerald Wellesley and other Etonian friends to raise the money to buy the Old Manor House and Manor Farm in Hackney Wick, more recently a dairy, and build new premises, next to Victoria Park Station, combining the two Clubs. A young Old Etonian architect, Harry Goodhart-Rendell (later a president of RIBA and with a lasting reputation) designed an elegant, state-of-the-art clubhouse, one wing for boys aged 14 to 18, another for the old boys. The wings were joined in the middle by a gym which could also serve as a theatre, and, in the basement, by a canteen and library.



Behind the Clubs, Goodhart-Rendell also rebuilt the Manor House to look like something by Edwin Lutyens, surrounded by beautiful gardens. The Manor House had about eight bedrooms where the Old Etonians giving their spare time to the running of the Clubs could stay. The new premises were opened on 1st July 1913, by the Clubs' first and last President, Field Marshal Lord Roberts V.C.

Wellesley made the Clubs independent of the Church Mission in 1913, the precipitating issue being the vicar's desire to fund construction of a new church tower (built 1911-12 to a design by Cecil Hare and guarding the yard in which the first Mission Hall and 'Eton House' stood).



A precedent for divorcing a club from the church which set it up could be found at St Nicholas Cole Abbey in the City. Its Rector Henry Cary Shuttleworth, who had been educated at Forest School, Walthamstow, started a club for lectures, music and summer sports. In 1895 Shuttleworth dissociated the club from the church of which he was rector and allowed non-churchgoers to join. *

* The Friends of the City Churches Newsletter August 2007

From then onwards the Clubs' existence depended upon the energy, skills and commitment of Wellesley and his chosen associates, using the network of Old Etonians to get money, management, facilities outside London, and to some extent employment for the young members.

The typical Eton College student would go on to Oxford or Cambridge University. Oxford had its links with the Toynbee Hall settlement. It is not clear at the moment why Old Etonians like Wellesley identified more closely with their former school rather than their university. Eton was the more exclusive institution. Wellesley and his friends would not have felt an affinity with those who became or were close to the pacifist, internationalist, modernist, sexually uninhibited Bloomsbury Group such as Maynard Keynes (educated Eton and King's College Cambridge) and Lytton Strachey.

Vyvyan Richards, a history teacher, brought members of the Bancroft's School Cadet Corps camping by his hut on Pole Hill, Chingford where they were visited by T E Lawrence. On returning from service in the First World War Richards made the Corps less military.



Wellesley in uniform

By the outbreak of the First World War Wellesley (who became known as 'Father') had found other former Etonians to help him run the Clubs : Edward Cadogan, Alfred Wagg and Arthur George Child Villiers (born 1883 the second son of the Earl of Jersey, attending New College Oxford after Eton, an investment banker, and initially known in the Clubs as 'Child').

Villiers' family pronounce their name 'villas' but that was not used at the Clubs, at least in living memory.

Villiers and his friend George Schuster were on a committee arranging the Sixth International Congress on Social Work and Service which would have been held in London in 1915*.

* Times 21st January 1914

In its early years the Clubs used the Lea for swimming (perhaps the river rather than the canal-like Navigation). There were annual summer camps at Cuckoo Weir, the Eton bathing pool on the Thames, where the boys would camp on one side of the river and the managers on the other, with concert parties in the evening, stump cricket, rounders and an invented game called handball which involved a lot of rugby tackling.

The Chin-Wag letters

From 1913 the Clubs produced a monthly newsletter called Chin-Wag which was to be a key means by which managers and Old Boys kept in touch with each other and with the Clubs, notably during the First World War.



Boys started work at the age of 14, if they could find a job and wanted one, but many of them were made redundant as an immediate reaction to the declaration of war. The Boys Club was re-opened earlier than usual after the summer holidays in 1914. As for those in the Old Boys Club, all of military age, Wellesley told them “that a member in regular work and with a family dependent upon him, would, at the moment, be doing a selfish and foolish thing if he gave it up to join the Army or Navy ; on the other hand, if they were out of work it was a different matter, and it was their clear duty to the country to enlist at once.” The President of the Club, Lord F. M. Roberts, holder of the Victoria Cross, declared to “all those who are physically fit, and who have reached the necessary age, that their duty is to offer themselves either as Soldiers or Special Constables to the country”. “Cheer others on and help them to bear hardships, privations and sorrow in the spirit of true patriotism.” All Club members of military age enlisted in the Forces. Over 200 managers and members served in the First World War, and 21 died.

Wellesley and Villiers, with Club manager Weatherby and member Fred Beldom, served together in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, leaving Alfred Wagg to run the Clubs with a local headmaster.

In 1930 a selection of letters from those serving in the Forces was reprinted in a bound volume, extracts from which follow this introductory essay. The letters were written to Arthur [Alfred] Wagg as Editor of the Eton Boys' Clubs' 'Chin-Wag' newsletter. They show the Club, its managers and its members in an attractive light. Early sound recordings show that the aristocracy and others educated at public schools spoke with a very strong accent, and the London poor had another very distinctive accent. Clothes were highly differentiated between social classes. Yet there was no trace of snobbery in the letters, and officers take their place amongst the privates and other low ranks in the Roll of Honour at the end of the book. Letters from Old Etonians mingle comfortably with those of the former Club members who had a more basic education. Wellesley's writings show him to have been utterly realistic about the youth of Hackney Wick. He was determined to see them as they were, but also to see their potential for leading worthwhile lives.

The ethos of the Eton Clubs was to have high standards of behaviour, and to do things well. Members should have been well prepared to serve in the armed forces. Letters obviously make many references to Club sports activities. It is not clear how conscious the managers had been that they were providing a training for wartime experience. Possibly if asked they would have hoped the boys would never have to fight but the existence of a pool of physically fit young men would deter others from aggression, and be the means of defeating any such aggression.

Whilst very proud to be British, the letter writers are rarely mean-spirited (in the printed extracts anyway) and can praise foreigners. There is comparatively mild dislike of Germans as Germans, but generally contempt for non-Europeans (perhaps a benign contempt). There is no glorification of war. The letter writers do not hide the grim nature of warfare, the squalor and horror of the trenches. They convey the overwhelming sensory experience of German shelling of British positions. These matters are extremely understated, as was the proud British way, but there is no denial or make-believe.

At an event on 20th September 2007 to launch the 'Up The Manor!' oral history project, Old Boys of the Clubs considered their core values to have been respect for authority, comradeship, sportsmanship, self-sufficiency and integrity.

A number of former Club members had emigrated before the War. Some came to serve in the Australian and Canadian forces, the former having a large role in the disastrous Gallipoli expedition. Managers of orphanages in the early 20th century such as the Bethnal Green Boys' Home in Leytonstone and the Infant Orphans Asylum in Wanstead believed that emigration was the best outcome for their pupils. Behind this was an image of the British Empire as providing new opportunities for those unlikely to find them in Britain itself.

30 acres of land across the River Lea from Hackney Wick, in Leyton, became available to the Clubs, and part of these were made into allotments on which Club members could grow vegetables. This produce compensated for food shortages caused by German submarine attacks on merchant shipping.

The history of the Club after the First World War

In the 1920 and 1924 Olympics Harry Mallin from the Eton Clubs won gold medals as a middleweight boxer. Mallin had become a policeman.

In the 1920s Arthur Villiers took over from Wellesley as the Old Etonian most visible at the Clubs. He divided this responsibility with remunerative work as an executive director of Barings bank from 1919 to 1954. Villiers began the process of creating a unique sports centre for the Club at 'The Wilderness', described in the Times obituary of Villiers as having been 'derelict, water-filled balast pits'. A Victorian bottle dump and landfill from demolished houses including a First World War hand grenade have been found in archaeological exploration before work started to construct 2012 Olympics facilities§ These facilities allowed the Clubs to expand their membership beyond Hackney Wick.

The Manor Charitable Trust was founded in 1924 to manage and support the Eton Boys' Clubs in Hackney.

§ visit on 9th November 2007

The Clubs had a period of great success in the 1930s for their football, cricket and rugby sides. They were probably the best resourced youth teams, with Villiers and Wagg paying £ 1,000 into the Clubs each year*.

Activities continued at the Wick premises including 'physical training', table tennis, rifle shooting, boxing, chess and draughts. There was also drama, debating and first aid. At least two Old Etonians were in the club every evening organising activities. The Boys Club included The Urchins (under 14s) and The Junior Bachelors Society (who undertook not to walk out with young ladies whilst under 18).

Hackney Wick had public baths from 1935 (and a library from 1947).



* talk by Michelle Johansen 20th September 2007

The London County Council sought parliamentary authority to take 30 acres of Hackney Marshes for a new housing estate. Villiers dissuaded the LCC from this intention in May 1936 by offering land north of Homerton Road on which the estate came to be built (a project of which he approved), Arena Field by the Navigation, the freehold of The Wilderness, £ 10,000 to improve facilities on the Marshes, and transfer of an option to purchase land each side of the northern end of Waterden Road.*

The Clubs continued to make allotments available for members' families. (The 'Manor Gardens' allotments off Waterden Road by the River Lea have now been requisitioned to become part of the 2012 Olympic Games infrastructure.)

From the 1930s Sir Edward Cadogan provided Club members with weekend and longer holidays at his Oxfordshire home, The Warren Farm.

Villiers went to live at The Wilderness from 1939† where he remained through the Blitz and up to his death in 1969. This may have reflected the general fear that cities would be devastated by bombing.

Second World War and afterwards

James Hilton, who spent his first 35 years in Walthamstow before leaving for Hollywood, wrote : "I do know that there have been tremendous improvements since those days; that free meals and medical inspections have smoothed down the rougher differences between the poor man's child and others; that, under Hitler and Stalin and Neville Chamberlain alike, the starved and ragged urchin has become a rarity. Such a trend is common throughout the world and we need not be complacent about it, since its motive is as much militaristic as humanitarian. But it does remain, intrinsically, a mighty good thing. I believe I would have benefited a lot from the improved elementary school of today. I might not have learned any more, but I should probably have had better teeth." ("To you Mr Chips" by James Hilton)

* Times Digital Archive

† Times obituary

The Club had grown much larger by the time the Second World War started. Over 600 managers and members served in the Forces and about 60 died. This suggests to me that Club members may have taken on more dangerous roles than the norm.

Villiers' elder brother the 9th Earl of Jersey allowed Osterley Park to be used in 1940 for unofficial civil defence training sponsored by the publisher of the Picture Post and headed by that magazine's war correspondent Tom Wintringham (who had fought with the Communists in the Spanish Civil War but had since left the Party). The school was taken over by the government in 1941 and soon closed.

Enemy air raids in the Second World War greatly exacerbated a shortage of affordable housing. Villiers bought and built properties in Hackney and other east London suburbs, notably at Onslow Gardens and nearby streets in South Woodford. He re-housed 150 old boys and their families at low rents or even rent-free.

Sir Edward Cadogan hosted residential study groups at his Warren Farm home as well as holidays.

About 1948, when polio infection was a big threat to adolescents, the camps moved from Cuckoo Weir on the Thames to an area of Ashdown Forest in Sussex called the Isle of Thorns which belonged to Alfred Wagg.

Club sporting success continued into the 40s, 50s and 60s.

The cinder-based athletics track for the London 1948 Olympic Games at Wembley was transferred to The Wilderness, with the later Conservative Party Cabinet Minister Duncan Sandys playing an important role in this. Chris Brasher ran on the Wilderness track, which was the first one available after the Second World War to have floodlights for the start of the athletics season.

(A little of the track has been preserved in archaeological exploration before work started to construct 2012 Olympics facilities (information given on a visit on 9th November 2007).

Alf Ramsey combined a place in the Tottenham Spurs team with coaching at Eton Manor. Len Wills played for the Manor but also for Arsenal.

On 31st October 1951 Honorary Freedom of the Borough of Leyton was given to the Honourable Arthur George Child-Villiers DSO, DL. This suggests that membership of the Clubs had for some time expanded beyond Hackney Wick into Leyton.

The Sixties

The Clubs' 1961-62 Programme records the achievements of sections competing in Cross country running, Athletics, Swimming and water-polo, Boxing, Football, Cricket, Table-tennis, Pentathlon, Bowls, Rugby, Rifle-shooting, Basketball, Five-a-side, Chess and Squash and active in First-aid, Photography and General knowledge.

The Clubs had 12 football teams. The Harriers had premises on the edge of Epping Forest (Chingford). A floodlit event on The Wilderness was sponsored by Leyton Borough Council, and Hackney Borough Council sponsored a midsummer event. The whole of the Wilderness grounds were open to the public for an annual Open Day at which Eton Manor took on neighbouring clubs such as Woodford Green and Victoria Park. This athletics event attracted large crowds. In April there was an annual Leyton to Southend Road Relay Race. Les Golding, secretary to the British Olympics athletics team in 1966, was active at the Eton Manor Clubs for many years.

Boxing and cricket had declined in popularity but rugby and golf were increasing. The Otters Swimming section had three sessions a week at the local baths.

Easter educational courses for members were given at Eton College by staff there, though mainly for Grammar-school boys – suggesting some Club members were middle class.

After Sir Edward Cadogan died in 1962 Villiers as a tribute to him arranged courses to be held for A-level students at Hertford College, Oxford and for O-level students at Eton College and Timsbury Manor, Hampshire. From December 1965 courses were held at Middleton Stoney in Oxfordshire where the Manor Charitable Trust purchased property for an educational centre. After the closure of the Boys' Clubs in 1967 these courses were made available free of charge to state and independent school students throughout the country.

In the early 1960s the Hackney Wick premises were described as having at this time a main hall on the upper floor used for golf, boxing, drama etc. The rest of the building contained games rooms, lecture rooms, library, canteen and bathrooms. There was a miniature rifle-range in the basement. There was a squash court in the garden (2 more at the Wilderness). There was a floodlit lawn and an outdoor floodlit hard-court for 5-a-side football and padder-tennis. “Room has been set aside in the basement where wives and girl friends of old boys can, when necessary, sit comfortably and wait for members.”

Boys' subscription was 2/- or 4/- according to age. Nearly a third of boys joining quickly dropped membership.

The Sports Ground known as 'The Wilderness' had in its 30 acres 9 football pitches plus cricket pitches, 2 rugby pitches, 6 tennis courts, a bowling green, a squash court, a netball court, padder courts, a small gymnasium, a splash-pool, a full size running track combined with a stadium, a physiotherapy room, a main pavilion, 2 canteens, changing rooms, bathrooms. As well as schools, the police also used the facilities, as did the Brookfield Manor Girls' Club.

"There is a strong link and a very happy friendship with ... schools in Hackney, Leyton and East London. They are given access to the Manor's playing fields and running track throughout the week".

The Isle of Thorns private camping ground in Ashdown Forest was still being used and had a large open-air swimming pool, soccer and cricket fields, padder and tennis courts, 9 hole golf course, large Sussex barn for indoor games, a dining hall and an assembly room. The ground was made available to schools and other clubs. The last Sunday in June was a Re-union Day at The Isle of Thorns. (Sussex University later bought the site and later still the main buildings became a large cats' home.)

The Eton Mission Rowing Club had a boat-house on the River Lea. Eton Racing Boats survived as a business connected with Eton College and rowing boat races until 2007.

The end of the Clubs

By 1964 the Club managers were complaining of the distractions of “motor-scooters, television, dance-clubs and holiday camps, and of the lack of demand for weekday evening activities in contrast to the Boys’ Clubs’ early years.

Hackney Wick was largely rebuilt on a new street pattern with local authorities as landlord. The Greater London Council's Trowbridge estate was built 1965-69 with seven 21-storeyed towers and left only Osborne and Prince Edward roads of the Wick’s old street pattern.

Villiers supported a campaign against immigration. He may or may not have felt non-white people were inherently inferior, but the Eton Manor Club’s vision had been of a strong British nation and this was not sufficiently shared by

those exercising power in the 1960s. Villiers was not a man to cherish illusions. After the last other long-term supporter Evelyn Baring died Villiers closed the Boys' Clubs, in 1965/67. The link between Eton College and the Church mission at St Mary's, Hackney Wick was terminated in 1965*.

The sports clubs refused to disband or to renounce the 'Eton' name. Villiers renamed the Wilderness 'Eaton Park' to try and cut its emotional link with the past.

Villiers died on 7th May 1969 at the age of 85.

A motorway was constructed in the 1970s around the perimeter of Hackney Wick, entailing demolition of the Club House in Riseholme Street and the Manor House (and the adjacent railway station). This was post-war



* St Mary of Eton with St Augustine 1880-1980 (The Eton Mission), a History by Margaret Chapman

redevelopment at its most brutal and alienating. (By 1987 three 1960s tower blocks had been demolished, and by 2007 much of Hackney Wick had been rebuilt again, on a human scale and attractively.)

The Clubs live on



Some sections of the Eton Manor Club continue as independent self-financing sports clubs.

Eton Manor Rugby Football Club at The New Wilderness, Nutter Lane, Wanstead E11 2JA had a £ 350,000 clubhouse built in 1996.

Eton Manor Athletics Club has its base at The Cottage, Marsh Lane off Church Road, Leyton E10



The Eton Manor football team used a number of stadiums before finding its present ground at Chadfield, St Chads Road, Tilbury, Essex, RM18 8NL

The Eton Manor Association has various activities for keeping alive Club memories and friendships such as an annual Remembrance Sunday service (at the Wilderness to 2006, and hopefully from 2008).

The June reunion continues annually at the Wanstead Eton Manor Rugby Club). In September 2007 the Association held its centenary dinner with some 400 Old Boys and their wives present.



From 1975 the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority attempted to run the 'Wilderness' sports ground in an ineffectual and under-resourced manner, and then closed it in 2001. (The Authority has a good record of managing other facilities successfully, such as the horse-riding centre and ice-skating rink near the 'Wilderness'.) The successful bid to host the Olympic Games has given the site a new purpose as the location of ancillary facilities and Paralympic tennis and archery, with an intention of longer term sports facilities after 2012.

A second study centre in 1989 was opened by The Manor Charitable Trust at Foxton near Cambridge. From that year both Middleton Stoney and Foxton were funded by The Baring Foundation. Middleton Stoney has now closed. In 2000 the charity changed its name to Villiers Park Educational Trust and has concentrated its work on courses and other activities for students of 14 to 19 years of age and their teachers.

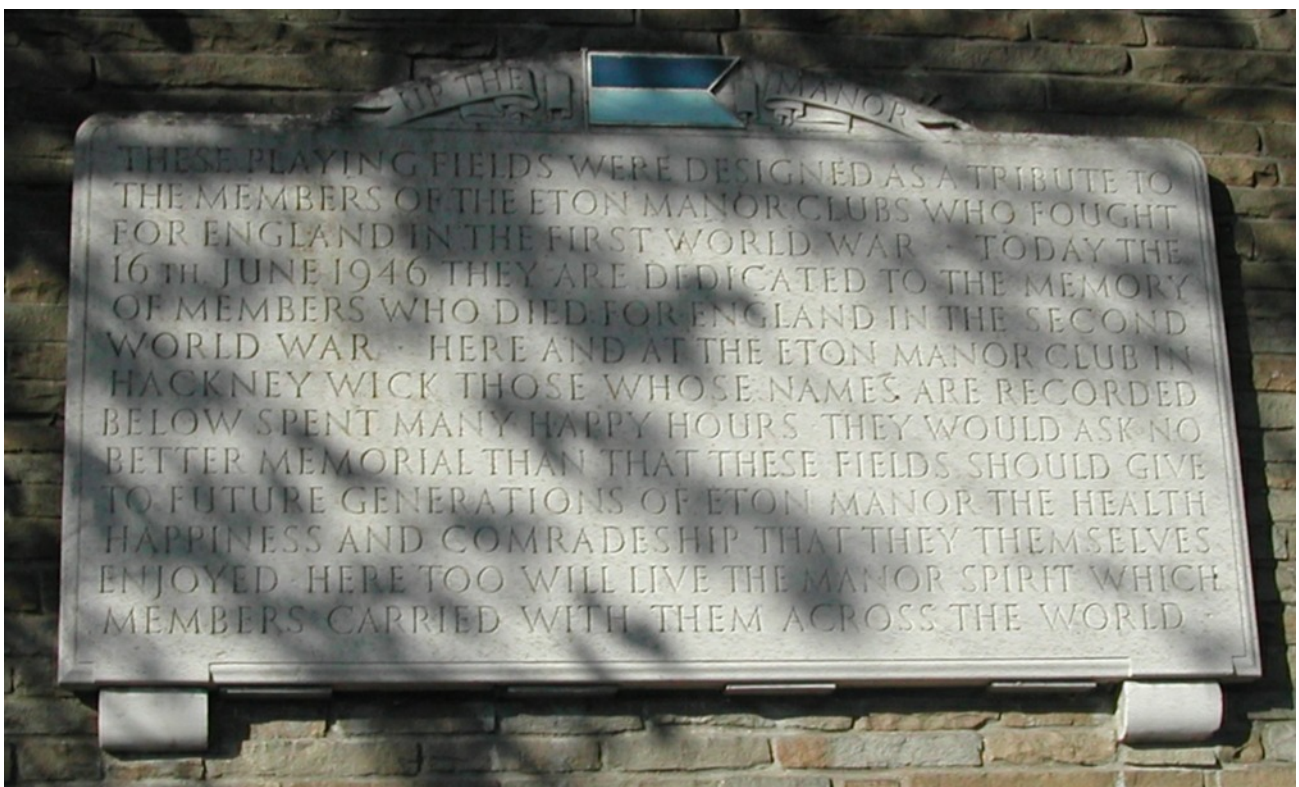
An Eton Manor Folk Club was based in a community Hall at Major Road, the Chobham Arms and the Lord Henniker pub. It held benefit nights for causes, notably the campaign against the motorway connection between the M11 and the Blackwall Tunnel approach road.

War memorials on the inner face of the high perimeter wall around the 'Wilderness' remain. The memorials are dedicated to the memory of 59 members of the former Eton Manor Clubs who died during World War II, and consist of three plaques, one listing the names of those who died who served

in the same regiment as two founder members of Eton Manor during World War I. The inscription on the central plaque reads: "These playing fields were designed as a tribute to the members of the Eton Manor Clubs who fought for England during the First World War. Today the 16th of June 1946 they are dedicated in memory of those who died for England in the Second World War. Here and at the Eton Manor Club in Hackney Wick those whose names are recorded below spent many happy hours. They would ask no better memorial than that these fields should give to future generations of Eton Manor the health, happiness and comradeship that they themselves enjoyed. Here too will live the Manor spirit which members carried with them across the world."

A reduced size copy of a war memorial that was at the Riseholme Street Clubhouse will be installed at the Eton Manor Rugby Club in Wanstead.

The Villiers Park Educational Trust in partnership with the George Mitchell School in Farmers Road, Leyton was awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant





A sculpture of the "V for Victory" sign made famous by Winston Churchill was added to the memorials. From the other side of the Wilderness boundary wall it represented Villiers' message to the planners who saw the Clubs' premises at The Wilderness and Riseholme Street as suitable targets for road-building.



When the Clubs closed the walls around The Wilderness at the junction of Ruckholt Road and Temple Mill Lane were rebuilt, with the only remaining entrance at the opposite corner on Quarter Mile Lane.

of £50,000 to create a permanent oral history 'Remembering and Celebrating the Eton Manor Boys' Club'. Students at George Mitchell School interviewed

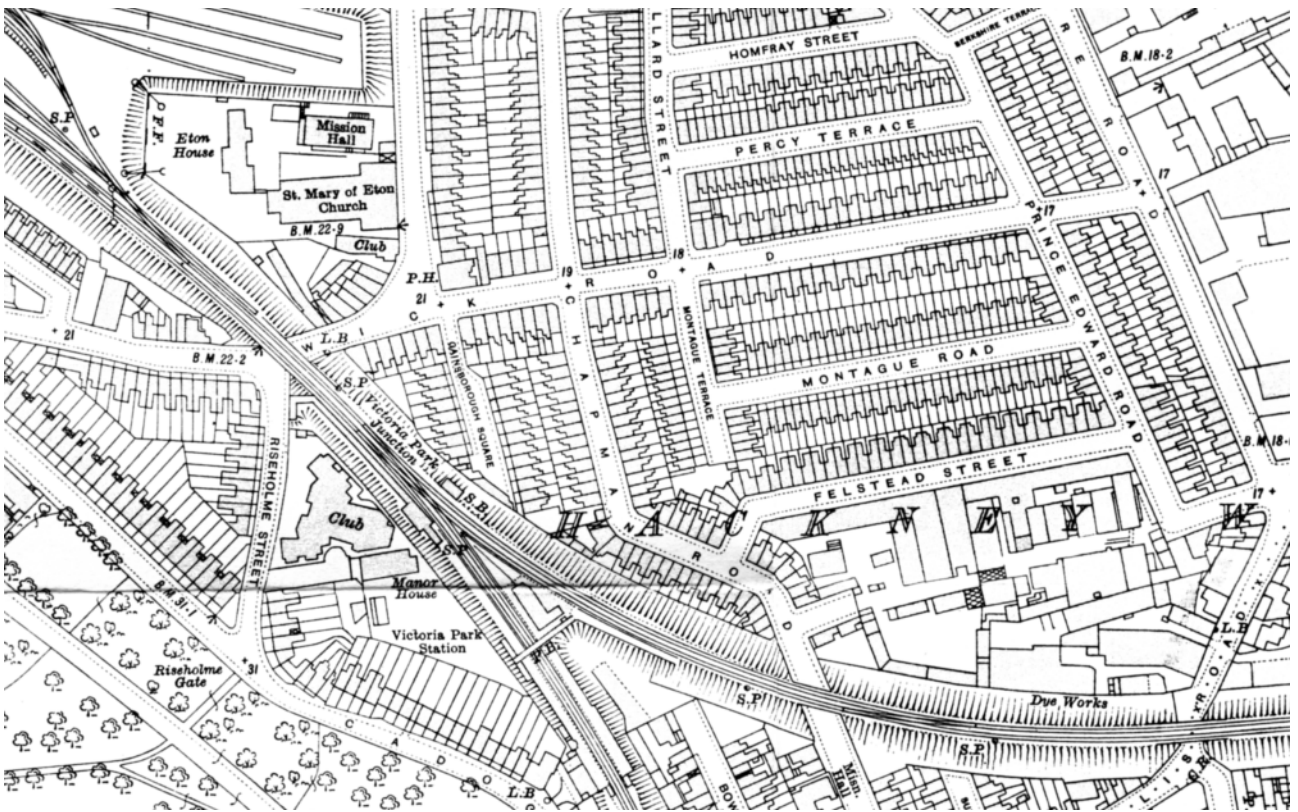
former members of the Eton Manor Boys' Clubs and the results have appeared in an exhibition, a DVD, a booklet and a teachers' resources pack. The project also has links with the Raphael Samuel History Centre at the University of East London and the Bishopsgate Institute.

The launch event on 20th September 2007 for the oral history project was called

Up The manor'

after the communal shout given by members and supporters of the Eton Manor Clubs.

The area that was once the Eton Manor Clubs' sports ground, 'The Wilderness', is part of the site for the Olympic Games in 2012.

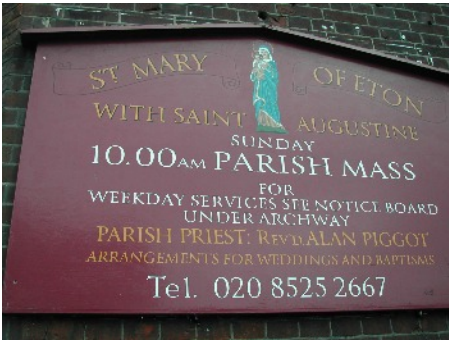


Ordnance Survey map of Hackney Wick about 1913



Charles Booth's poverty map of the area

St Mary of Eton today





Roll of Honour on the front of the Church. Few names appear both on this and on the Chin-Wag First World War Roll of Honour



The first Club meeting place, Eton Mission Hall, across a courtyard from the Church



Eton House at the end of the courtyard by the Church



A rear view of Eton



Old vinegar brewery surviving near the Church

Hackney Wick today



Grand former pub on the other side of the road from the Church



An elevated dual carriageway sweeps around Hackney Wick, this shot showing the end of a terrace that survived into 2007.



New housing on the other side of the Lea Navigation



Blue hoardings mark the boundary of the 2012 Olympics Games site, here Arena Field beside the Lea Navigation, open space being lost to development.

In contrast, the plaque in the porch of the church tower which celebrates saving Hackney Marshes from development.



IN REMEMBRANCE OF
THE REV. E. K. DOUGLAS
Vicar of S. Mary of Eton
The Eton Mission
Due largely to his initiative 337 acres
of Hackney Marshes were acquired
in 1890 as a perpetual open space
for the people of London

The site of Riseholme Street



The Riseholme entrance to Victoria Park



The route into the modern flats' car park marks one end of Riseholme Street, opposite Victoria Park



An island of trees in the traffic junction which replaces the eastern end of Riseholme Street

Demolition of the Wilderness sports ground buildings in 2007



The following are extracts chosen by David Boote from a selection of letters - written to Arthur [Alfred] Wagg as Editor of the Eton Manor Clubs' 'Chin-Wag' newsletter - which were edited by Anthony Crossley and published in 1930 as 'Chin-Wag, The War Records of the Eton Manor Clubs 1914-1918'.

Also reproduced are designs by the Punch cartoonist F. H. Townsend for Christmas cards to members .

The following extracts show the writers did not wish to hide the grim nature of the War but they also wanted to convey how resilience and a sense of humour could get the soldiers and sailors through the experience :

From Bert Woodruff

February, 1916

We had a none too easy time during the winter weather, owing to the trenches being in such a bad state when we took them over. We had hardly any dug-outs, and our first job was to make them. As we were not greatly experienced in this art, the dug-outs, of course fell in, and we had hardly any accommodation for sleeping purposes, until the Royal Engineers kindly consented to find us proper material for the purpose. Anyway it was January before we had finished this job. During all this time the mud and water had accumulated far too much to be comfortable, and we were well over our knees in it. It was impossible to go through the communication trenches, and the only way was to "chance it" over the top.

(The author was probably H[erbert] Woodruff, Corporal in 13th R.B.)

∞

From Ted Hayes

NETLEY
May, 1916

My address will very likely surprise you a bit, but I suppose you can guess what it means. I have had a little bit of German lead catch me in the thigh, and it has put me out of action for a little while.

I caught it at about six o'clock in the morning of the 17th March. We had just taken over the line, and on the night of the 16th we went into what were supposed to be trenches, but which were nothing else but shell-holes enlarged, and only about three feet deep, whilst all around was nothing but mud and water. These holes could only be approached at night time by a thin strip of solid earth, and in the day time there was absolutely no communication whatever, and the only thing to do was to lie as low as possible. It was a rotten position. Soon after daybreak on the eventful morning I settled myself down to get a bit of sleep on a pile of sandbags, so as to get out of the mud. I had not been asleep long before I woke up and heard the bullets whistling over me from behind ; the next second one caught me, and the force of it knocked me off my perch. The bullets had come from a German machine gun in a little valley almost right behind us. My pals soon bandaged me up, and I got as comfortable as possible in the mud at the bottom of our hole, and there I waited for night to come. That day I think was about the longest I have ever experienced, but the night came at last, and the stretcher bearers managed after a struggle to get me out, and I was then taken to a dressing station.

(The author must have been E Hayes, Rifleman 17th London Regiment.)

∞

From Alfred Lester

SEAMEN'S HOSPITAL
GREENWICH
(Undated)

For not writing to you whilst residing at High Street, Dardanelles, I beg to tender extreme sorrow, profound sorrow, sackcloth and cinders, etc., etc., but I will excuse myself with the fact that my stationery department was of a very limited nature. After carefully overhauling and stocktaking, I found that at no time did it exceed four sheets of margarine paper, a sardine tin for a writing bureau, and one-and-a-quarter inches (approximately) of H.B. pencil. However, as I am now engaged on the somewhat unexciting occupation of holding down a dysentery bed, I will endeavour to make up for lost time by doing the needful.

∞

From Lieut. Cadogan

MED. EX. FORCE

October, 1915

I have left England about five weeks now, three of which I have spent at the Dardanelles. It is a great experience, and I strongly recommend it to all those who grumble at small discomforts and small hardships at home. I did not know what hardship was until I came out here—but hard as it is, it has its advantages and ought to make men of those who are not men already. My chief grievance is want of food ; it is not merely that the food is poor and unsatisfying, but some nights I lie down so hungry I hardly know what to do. There is painfully little water too. ... The peculiarity of this place is that we are always, at all times and in all places, under fire (even in the so-called “rest” camps). One gets used to it, but a change of air would not be unwelcome ! Shells are whizzing through space overhead while I am writing, but I need hardly tell you I am in a “dug-out.” We live the life of rabbits here ; we are always burrowing into the ground. Well, I would not mind being back in Hackney Wick, and I trust the time is not far distant when we shall all meet in the big room of the Club again and exchange our thrilling war experiences. I wish I could find some members out here.

∞

From R. W. Pearce

June, 1916

What a difference between the base camps of France and those of the “Dards.” At the camp where we are now, they have picture palaces, Y.M.C.A., baths and every other thing a chap could wish for. At the “Dards,” we had absolutely nothing when we came out of the firing-line for rest. We had to bath in a mug or some other such large vessel ; and instead of going to a picture palace the same as you do here, we had to crouch in a 10-ft. hole and watch the shells burst. Some difference. What?

Thanks awfully for *Chin- Wag* and parcel. I received them on the boat just before we sailed.

Private, later Lance-Corporal, Pearce, 1 /2nd Royal Fusiliers, wounded or killed

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From Corpl. Stannard

June, 1917

Re your advert for a cannon well, I thought I should have been able to supply the Club with one when I got wounded, as it felt like a field-gun hitting me—but after a short time I discovered it to be only a rifle-shot. I got it in the right shoulder about 9 a.m. on the 19th April, and unfortunately had to lay out in the sun on my back till 7.30 p.m. the same night, owing to the vast amount of snipers, who could see the slightest move on our part. I then made my way back to the dressing-station, which was about two miles distant, where I received the greatest attention from our S.B.'s ; from there I rode on a camel to another station (this was a field ambulance). The ride on the camel was not what one would call a fine time, as these animals shake you up very much.
... Well, they soon patched me up, and sent me back to the line, where I am now writing this.

(Possibly Corporal A Stannard 3/10th London Regiment.)

∞

FROM G. V. WELLESLEY ("FATHER"), (2ND LIEUT.-CAPT. ROYAL OXFORDSHIRE HUSSARS;
FRANCE, 1914–18)

December, 1914

In the middle of Sunday night we were roused with the order to turn out at once. I was in bed at the moment with an attack of influenza, which did not make things any the more pleasant especially as it was pitch black and raining cats and dogs, but we tumbled out somehow, and in less than an hour everything was packed and ready, and we were all hustling in the little village street. Having discovered my horses, and felt in the dark to see which were their heads and which were their tails, I climbed on to one, and at two o'clock we clattered off down the road and out into the country with no idea as to where or why we were wanted.

The following extracts show the value to the writers of Eton Manor Club membership :

From Lieut. the Hon. A. Kinnaird

February, 1916

I must just send you and the club my very best wishes for 1916—how I wish I could look in on you all to-morrow—still that can't be, so instead please give my love to all my friends ; I wish I could come across some of them here, but so far I have drawn a blank. My *Chin-Wag* for December filled me with interest and I am now impatiently waiting for the next number. How are you and everyone ? It seems a long time ago since I saw you at St. James' Square, though it is really only six weeks ago.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website records that Lieutenant The Honourable Arthur Middleton Kinnaird, son of the 11th Baron Kinnaird and Baroness Kinnaird of Rossie Priory, Inchture, Perthshire, of the 1st Battalion Scots Guards, died on 27th November 1917 at the age of 32, and is buried in Ruyaulcourt Military Cemetery. His brother The Hon Douglas Arthur was also killed in the War.

∞

From Jock Williamson

May, 1916

I think that the club is doing splendid considering the amount of chaps that are away, and I think a great deal of praise is due to those at home who are doing their best to keep the old flag flying. I often try to picture what that night will be like when this war is finished, and the boys meet round the old Club fire ; what a night that will be when they are all telling their experiences, but I think the best tale will be, "How Father got his other star," by one who knows.

(The author J Williamson, Private in the 13th Battalion of the Essex Regiment, was killed on 2nd June 1916 by the explosion of a shell, and is buried in Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery, Souchez; one of the oldest members of the Eton Old Boys' Club, and he was the first of its members to get married.)

∞

I got to the spot where the gallant Oxford Hussars were, and then to find the gentleman I wanted was but a few minutes' enquiry. I walked into a field, and a few yards away I could see that good old smiling face of Lieutenant Weatherby ; and with hand extended he approached me, saying, "Hullo, old crab, wherever have you sprung from ?" and a thousand-and-one other questions all in one breath "you do look well. What do you think of our horses, etc. ? Have you seen Lt. Wellesley and Major Villiers ? you will find them in an adjoining field"—to which I proceeded soon after, and there I saw Lt. Wellesley inspecting his horses in his same old style but minus his old—perhaps better say favourite—brown hat which he sent for very soon after he saw me. The same question was put—"Wherever have you sprung from ?" and luckily there was a hole at the side of me, so I explained I had come from that. Whilst we were talking he drew my attention to a stalwart young man that was coming along slipping and sliding round the edge of a pond, hurrying up to make up for some little misdemeanour that he had committed some little time previous. On turning round I saw my old chum F. Beldom. "Hullo, Mr. Graves !" and after a real good shake of the hand and one of Fred's best smiles, for which he is noted, Lt. Wellesley proceeded to cross the field, keeping me from view of Major Villiers. He spoke a few words to him, then suddenly stepped aside, and then there was some more handshaking, etc. ; then the major and I went and had a look at his Rumbler bike—and if not praising Rudge Whitworth's too much, it is still in a wonderful condition. On proceeding towards the bike we heard lots of laughter and shouting, and on turning we saw some poor young officer being robbed of all his clothing, less his boots, and on the Major asking me what I thought of the joke, I said it would have been better to have done it in "Cuckoo Weir" style and thrown him into the river (but he is remanded there being no river). After this I was taken to see Major Villiers' chargers, and beautiful horses they were and most splendidly groomed. ...

Well, after tea Lt. Wellesley and I went for a walk some little distance, and we talked of old times and present times, after which we returned, because there was a lot of work to be done, for the Oxfords were in the saddle again ; and after wishing them farewell and great success on the work they were in for, with a wave of the hand the happiest day I have had in France had come to an end.

(One W Graves was a Private in the 9th Corps A.S.C. and the other a Sergeant in the 7th London Regiment who was wounded.)

∞

From Fred Beldom

April, 1917

. . . I felt quite ashamed of myself, and so I thought I would try to retrieve some of my lost character by writing to tell you the first piece of exciting news I have had to tell since I came to France : "I've been sent to hospital sick." [treatment for a rupture] ...

My most important bit of news is that I have the famous Percy as a visitor every other evening—great ! isn't it ? He is in the town close by, and you may be sure we have lots of yarning to do ; the question is—whether we shall get through all our news before the time comes for me to depart.

(F Beldom, Trooper in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, wounded in the War.)

∞

From Pte. W. G. Wilson

June, 1915

Yet another famous interview. My attention was drawn to a fellow sitting down in a dug-out, smoking a ——— (?). As we are in the habit of having a yarn with the sailors I threw a stone and hit this particular fellow, who looked round, and to my surprise and pleasure behold Seaman Hotz ! "How's the game Peter, boy ?" "Oh, good, how are you?" Of course being an Australian I replied "Bonzer." I wanted to show him *Chin-Wag*, but he had already seen it. I gave him a cap badge, he gave me his ship's badge. We have spent several afternoons together, but he is going aboard soon, so I expect I shall not see him again for some time.

Private in the 11th Australian Infantry Brigade. An issue of *Chin-Wag* reported that he "left the Club some three years ago to emigrate to Australia, and joined the Australian forces at the outbreak of war; killed in action out in Gallipoli".

∞

From Bert Jasper

December, 1917

I have just received *Chin-Wag*, and parcel, for which I thank you very much. They were both a godsend to me, for we can get nothing here : if one was a millionaire one would be as badly off as the poorest man on earth—so you can guess what it is like.

I am interested in the nature of British patriotism in the First World War, and the following more extensive selection reflects that interest of mine :

From Jock Williams

March, 1916

in some places, where the people have had to fly suddenly, they have left photos of father, mother, sisters, brothers, and little children, hanging on the walls. I can tell you it touched me up when I saw the hundreds of homes that have been wrecked, and I could not help thinking of the poor families that have had to fly and leave their homes behind : my first words were "Thank God this is not in England." In one I looked into, there was a line full of baby's clothes hanging ; in another place the vases were still on the mantel piece ; and when men who have homes and families of their own see these sights, you can guess how they must feel. There is a coal mine here smashed to the ground. Let's hope that the Huns soon get such a smashing that will make them sorry they ever started this terrible war.

I had a fine experience the week before last, I was sent to a place some distance from here, to learn a French gun. The village we were sent to had never had British soldiers there before, and I can tell you, they did make a fuss of us. The French soldiers are a decent lot of fellows, and made us very welcome. We had to have our food with them, and it seemed strange to us, as their meals are different to ours. Their first meal is at 10.30 a.m., and we had soup, steak, and potatoes, with beaucoup vin rouge, and coffee to follow. The next meal was at 5 p.m., and we had the same as in the morning. The cook had been a chef in civil life, and you can bet our food was well cooked. The soldiers used to take us to an estaminet and sing French songs, and we would sing them an English one in return. You would have laughed could you have seen us trying to make them understand us. We are making deaf and dumb motions to them, and suddenly they will get excited and start "Wee compree, compree ! Bon ! Bon ! Wee, wee, wee. Compree. Tres bon !"

(The name of the author seems to have been printed incorrectly and to have been J Williamson, Private in the 13th Essex Regiment, who was killed on June 2nd 1916 by the explosion of a shell; one of the oldest members of the Eton Old Boys' Club, and he was the first of its members to get married.)

∞

(Writer unknown)

February, 1917

All the first letters one receives from England on coming to Paris contain the same question—"What is Paris like in War time ?" ...

From necessity everything in civil life is done by women, I have even seen them cleaning the streets and lifting heavy cases, but this is not regarded as extraordinary—least of all by the women themselves ; "C'est la guerre" is the invariable response to a question as whether they find the work hard. They are always ready to laugh ; I think this nation was born smiling.

∞

From F. Denman

June, 1917

I don't know if I told you, but the Germans have got a very good idea of how to destroy villages just the same as they have when they drop bombs over London or over any other place. It seems as if it is bred in them to wantonly destroy anything that is in their way. ... in the village there is not a house standing ; so it is with all the villages we passed through.

(This seems to be the same F Denman, Private in the M.G.C., who by January 1918 was on a ship to the Near East which was sunk but he survived.)

∞

From H. Benjamin

June, 1917

I hear the Zepps, etc., have been troubling you again, and pretty seriously, too. I hope that everything and everybody is alright in Hackney Wick, though some poor devils have cliqued. It was absolutely awful to read of poor little innocent children losing their lives to satisfy the blood lust of the Kaiser and his friends. I can tell you some very unpleasant remarks were heard when someone brought in a paper containing the news. Men out here who have wives and children out in Blighty cursed till they almost choked ; and if we should get a chance for revenge on those ——— I guess it will be taken. But anyway the boys in the trenches are wiping off the scores, and it can be safely left to them to repay in full.

(H. Benjamin was a Private in the 151st Company Labour Corps)

∞

From Wal. Law

October, 1918

I am sorry that I haven't been able to get my letters etc., answered up to date owing to the constant shifting ; it's a shame to see these Belgium people, some with their homes wrecked and living in cellars. We were billeted in one place where all the town had collected in a cellar of a "Brasserie." It is another life to them to see a Tommie—the kiddies clambered round, old men wished to shake hands, also the women, and if we had let the mademoiselles they would have kissed us, and it was terrible when Fritz put over some shells ; they would all go on their knees and pray, some crying and others screaming.

(W Law was a Private in 1/4th Royal Sussex Regiment)

From Corpl. W. E. Lester

November, 1918

I am out here with Jack Graves and Joe Johnson, and at present we are quartered in a village whose chief characteristics are horrible beer and busted houses. We are about twenty miles from civilisation, apparently forgotten and uncared for. There are only two shops in the vicinity, both pubs., and the inhabitants speak a jargon that sounds like a cross between Siamese and a "Ford" car breaking down. Of course, we have the ever-prevalent mud, otherwise there are no pleasant features.

Jerry has been giving the inhabitants a rough time. When we made our entry into this outfit, everybody was singing the Marsellaise, waving flags, and generally going batchy. When the bugles blow "First and Last Posts" at night, they imagine the performance is inaugurated for their benefit and give us an exhibition of the Tango and Two-step round the band.

(The author may be the W Lester who is in the Chin-Wag Roll of Honour as a sergeant in 2/10th London Regiment.)

From R. W. Pearce

MALTA

(Date uncertain)

. . . The other week we were camped with half a battalion of New Zealand Maoris, and my word they are the finest set of men I have ever seen ; they stand over six feet, and most of them are as broad as they are long, as the saying goes. Speaking plainly, I expected to see a crowd of savages clothed in gorgeous robes, and armed with a tomahawk in each hand and a few spears in the other, but I got a very big surprise ; they were altogether different to what my imagination had formed of them. They were clothed and equipped the same as we are, they are just as civilised as we are, and they can speak English like a book and take a hand in all British sports and games ; I might mention that they have some hot men amid their ranks. The other day they were inspected by Lord Methuen and his staff, and after the inspection they did their old time Maori dance. I have never seen such a sight in all my life. All their wearing apparel consisted of was a short pair of knickers, their faces and bodies were painted and tattoed all over, and to put the finishing touch to the picture they all wore coloured plumes in their heads. That alone was enough to make any nervous man scoot, but when they started dancing, and chanting weird songs and yelling in the most horrible of voices, and, mark you, they were pulling awful faces all the time they were singing, it was enough to make any Egyptian image shake, let alone any man.

Private, later Lance-Corporal, Pearce, 1 /2nd Royal Fusiliers, wounded or killed

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From A. R. Reynolds

(Undated)

... am trying a new dodge now, riding camels, rather a change from the horse ; everything is A1, you only have to look on when in charge of these camels, the niggers do the rest, just give them a buckshee cigarette. I wonder what I shall be when this is over, I'm a navy one day, then bossing blacks the next. It's rather a laugh to get them to understand you.

(Gunner A R Reynolds, 103rd Brigade, R.F.A.)

∞

From F. Denman

August, 1918

I am convalescent now, and am able to get about a little. I was out this morning and had a march to one of the parks near Cairo, and it is a rule to get the native kids to box one another. You would laugh to see them : talk about the Urchins, they aren't in it with them ! The chaps make a ring and the kids enter two at a time, and then you see some ragtime boxing, head-butting, clinching, and kicking, and calling one another names ; and if one happens to get a whack beside the ear or jaw—well, you'd think Bedlam had been let loose, for the unfortunate one stands and lets fly with his tongue, and of course the other one, urged on by the chaps, starts on him till they are back at it again. One poor little devil, he wouldn't fight—or did for awhile, and then he tried to get away : Gippo copper got hold of him and took him in charge and gave him a walloping with his cane. I have seen chaps taken up for some things ; but being taken up for refusing to fight is about the limit—what do you say ?

From Capt. Villiers

June, 1915

My regiment has gone into the trenches again to relieve other cavalry who were gassed and attacked, although I was four miles away from the gas, my eyes ran and smarted. This gas will ultimately be of no advantage to Germany, but if you saw the suffering which it causes, and then recollect that it is used against their pledged word, you could find no words fit to describe the crime of those who permit its use. I have tried hard not to believe all the awful stories told of the Germans, but this last act—the use of gas—makes it impossible for me to believe that those who are responsible for the government of Germany will ever be allowed to set foot in any country that is at war with them. I would a thousand times sooner lose my own life, and that of every friend of mine, than make a peace which would not degrade the present ruling parties in Germany.

In contrast with the tolerance of Club managers and members, Chin-Wag's former printer A. E. Rogers in Iraq formed an antipathy towards one section of that area's population, the Mahdi, by which he seems to mean the 'Marsh Arabs' of current news reports, rather than Shi'a Moslems :

From Chin-Wag's ex-Printer—Mr. A. E. Rogers

December, 1916

The Tigris and Euphrates are two very fine rivers, navigable for fairly large vessels a considerable distance : but I wouldn't give a tinker's curse for ten of them beside a piece of the Thames we know as the "Pool." All the same they are fine rivers.

The present population is entirely Arab, and they are a dirty, disease stricken crew. They are making a thundering fine thing out of Tommy's presence, and I often wonder if we are not here for their special benefit. They run the canteens, and almost everything we buy here is from an Arab.

From A. E. Rogers

September, 1917

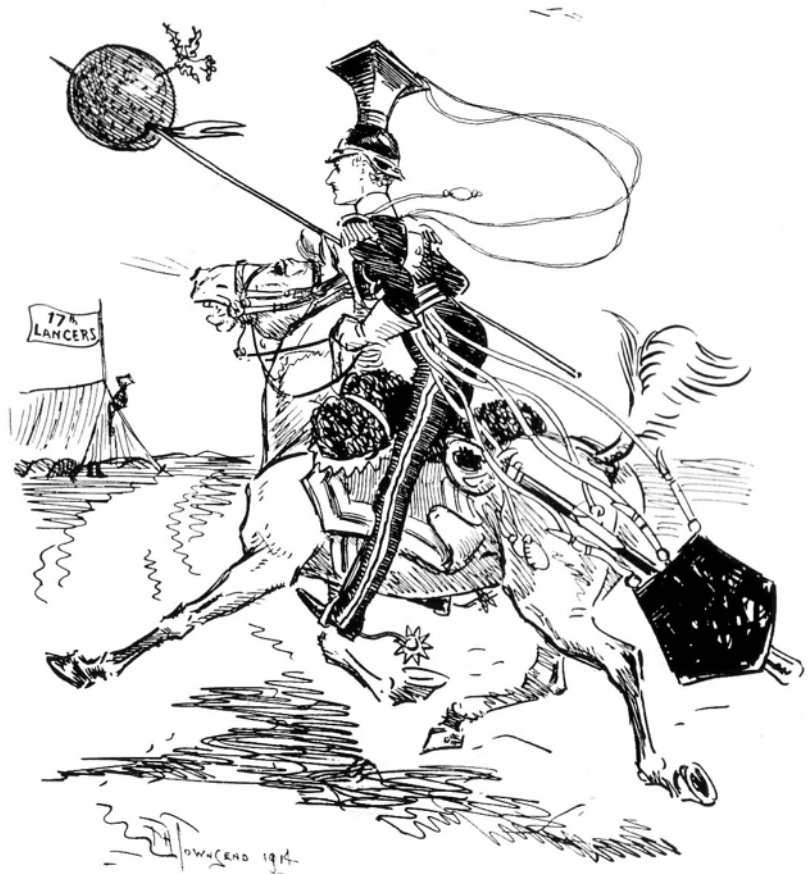
The chief of the Arab's commandments seems to be, "What's his is mine, if I'm man enough to take it." Might is right every time and all the time ; and that doctrine is fully recognised by all parties. The presence of so many troops in the country has put a stop to much of this, but that principle is law, absolute, although unwritten. In that respect they are only following the example of their former ruler, the Turk. Owing to their roving disposition, agriculture is a fault rather than a forte with them. They are a cleanly race as a rule, and one can find much to respect about them. One seldom finds them beg ; whereas "Bachsheesh, sahib" (Gift, sir) are the first words a Mahdine baby learns. So much for the Bedouin.

The Mahdine, on the other hand, is an absolute parasite. He lives solely on what he can steal or beg, and, in Tommy's opinion, is only distinguished from other reptiles by the fact that he doesn't crawl on his stomach. He is to be found in the marsh districts—where he expends a little energy in cultivation (mostly the everlasting date !) and on the river banks—where he earns some sort of livelihood with a "bellam" (something like a narrow dinghy) or a "mehalla" (native barge). Like the Bedouin, he is polygamous ; but in marriage, he considers the number of wives necessary to keep him rather than the number he can keep !

...

I once heard Hackney Wick described as "Noted for fleas, flies, kids and Clarnico's jam" ; and if you substitute "dates" for "Clarnico's jam," that definition exactly describes Basra to the last fle—sorry—fly ! The place is rather more than overstocked with all four of the commodities mentioned.

**Eton Old Boys Club
Christmas cards 1914-19**



CHRISTMAS CHEER

Gallant Recapture of the Pudding by Lieut. Wellesley

The creator of these cartoons, Frederick Henry Townsend was born in London in 1868. He studied at Lambeth School of Art. Townsend contributed to several newspapers and magazine including The Daily Chronicle, Punch Magazine, The Graphic, The Tatler and The Illustrated London News. Books illustrated by Townsend included Maid Marian (1895), Jane Eyre (1896), Shirley (1897), A Tale of Two Cities (1897), The Scarlet Letter (1897) and Rob Roy (1897). In 1905 Townsend became the first Art Editor of Punch Magazine. He also contributed cartoons including 'No Thoroughfare' after the German invasion of Belgium. Frederick Henry Townsend died while playing golf in 1920. 8th November 2007}

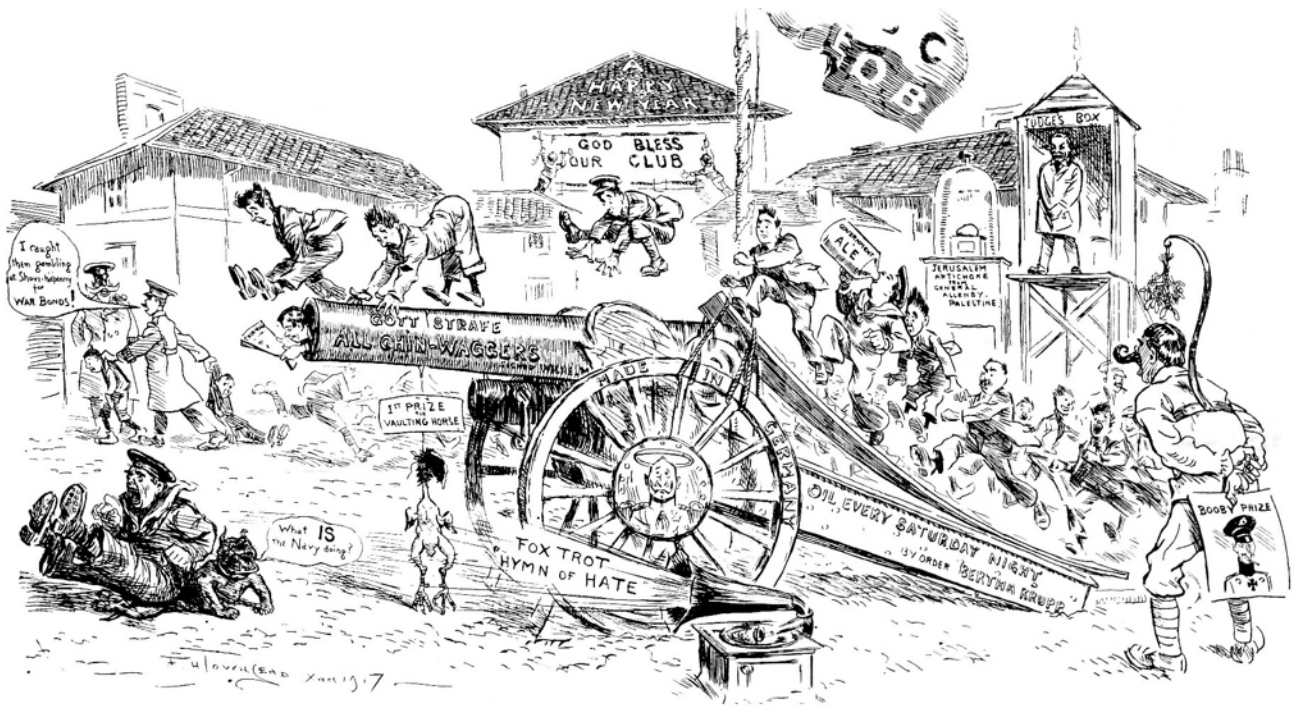


OUR HOME-MADE TANK
Christmas 1916



CHIN-WAGGERS' SHARE IN WINNING THE WAR

1915



THE CLUB'S GERMAN GUN
As imagined by our Artist



“ THE DRINK ”
December 1918



AFTER WAR, PEACE

1919



A MESSAGE OF GOODWILL TO MEMBERS
Christmas 1914

This one was not a Christmas card :



OPENING OF THE CLUB RIFLE RANGE
May 1915

Taking it on the Chin

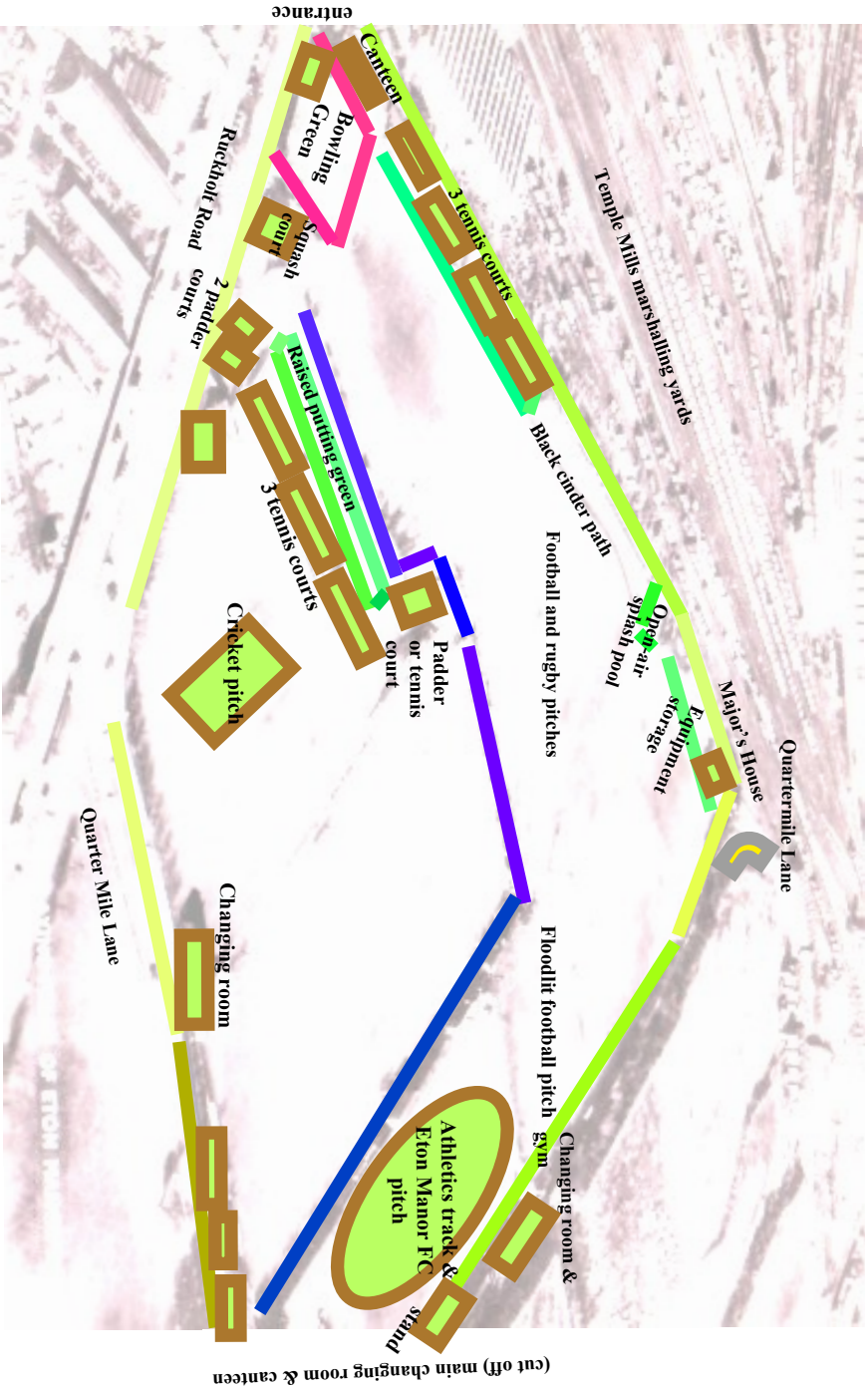


Diagram of the facilities at the Wilderness sports ground