

years ago by the villagers of Stanmer and Falmer? Perhaps it should go to the Sussex Family History Group if they would care to house it at The Keep?

BERNARD WILSON  
bernardwilson3@btinternet.com

# The Guardianship Society

.....Gillian Capon-Browning

I was born in East Chiltington in 1933. It is a small hamlet about one and a half miles from the road that runs to Ditchling under the South Downs. My grandfather rented a 14 acre small holding from the council. There were three of these holdings, some of them larger than others. I suspect that they had all been built on land that was once part of the larger Farm Wootton which was still up the rough lane which led to them all. As these holdings were quite small, they did not have men or horses to carry out the work which had to be done at certain times of the year, such as ploughing, haymaking, pulling and carting the swedes and mangolds which we grew to feed the cattle in the winter. We all used to get together to help each other, and the equipment and horses were used to the benefit of all.

Because the holdings needed help but could not afford to employ, they used the services of the Guardianship Society. For years I have wondered what it was and who ran it. It was originally founded by a lady called Grace EYRE who was born in Brighton on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1864. Her family lived at 12 Norfolk Terrace. When it was founded the Society was called the Grace Eyre Foundation. It ran until 1936 when it was taken over by another concern. It was formed to take children who were mentally disabled, or crippled, or who had nobody to care for them, and to try and find work in society for them to do. The idea was sound but lacked supervision as the children were not always placed into kind caring homes. The homes they were placed in were only inspected once a year and the welfare of these young people was often sadly neglected.

I remember trying to teach the young man who came to us first to work how to read. His name was Ron; I do not remember how long he was with us. The second young man arrived one afternoon with a great lump cut out of his head. It was three cornered and stood proud on his forehead. I asked him how he got it and he replied that the warden had hit him for fighting. I can only assume that he had come from a home or borstal. My grandfather found him difficult to control and he sometimes ran away. Once he made a fire in the roots of a tree which stood at the bottom of our meadow – I don't know where he got the matches from. I know his

name was Harry BOUCHER, but where he came from I do not know. As he was difficult he did not stay with us long.

The next to arrive was a tall handsome young man. He had fair curly hair and the face of an angel. Nowadays he would have been accepted as a pop star as when put to work in the garden he would be standing humming a tune and holding the hoe to his lips like a musical instrument. His name was Gordon CHAMBERLAIN and he had a mother and younger brother in Guildford. My mother and I went to see them once and stayed for a couple of days. It was during the time that the new cathedral was being built and we went to see the shell of it on the hill. There was also a pet shop near the railway station and it had a monkey in a cage. I put my finger in whilst talking to it and was severely reprimanded by the owner as it could have bitten it off.

It is funny the things that come to mind as you look back on your life. I have often looked back on the days when these young men from the Guardianship Society lived with my grandparents and felt shame for the way they were treated. None of the young men who lived with us were allowed to eat with us. We ate in the dining room whilst they had to sit by themselves in the scullery. There was a comfortable arm chair beside the black range which was lit when it was cold for heating and cooking. Water had to be drawn from the well in the backyard and we had no electricity, only oil lamps and candles. The toilet was a bucket in a cupboard in the backyard. Gran did the washing in the copper on a Monday in the bathroom which was off the scullery. We all had baths on a Monday evening, with the water from the copper which had been refilled. In those days there was no TV and the only wireless was a battery one which was turned on once a day for the news and Uncle Mack the children's hour. My grandmother suffered from her nerves and could not tolerate any noise, even when I was sitting beside her practising my music on the piano. There was no entertainment for the young men from the Society – they could only sit in the chair until bedtime. They were not allowed to go into the village or have friends, but they were warm and well fed whilst living with us.

Up the rough lane which ran beside our back gate were two other holdings and the main old farm Wootton. Beside this was a very old black wooden cottage, the original farm house, the front of which had ivy covering it in which the sparrows built their nests. The elderly parents of the farmers wife lived here and I often went to tea with them and their granddaughter. I remember that the floors inside were bare with highly polished brown boards and there was a large brick baking oven in the corner of the big kitchen. In the farmhouse next door lived their daughter, her husband and their six children: Tom (who died of measles), Phillis (who emigrated to New Zealand), Peggy (who married locally), Peter (who was lost at sea), John (who went to New Zealand after his father died) and Pat (who married locally and also went to New Zealand). This family had three Guardianship Boys. One of them was an indoor helper who carried out the household duties such as washing up,

carrying the water up from the kitchen to the bathroom for baths and peeling the large amount of vegetables needed to feed the family. The second was short dark haired person with a permanent stoop. He walked with his eyes on the ground and never spoke. His job was to go to the local shop to get what the family needed. The local pub, The Jolly Sportsman, also known as The Old Thatch had a small shop which sold sweets and bottles of pop. Other than that it meant three miles by rough private road, called the Ferrings which came out at Green Cross, and a two mile walk along the main road and over the crossings into Plumpton. This man would be seen going back and forth sometimes as often as three times a day in all weathers. Gran would say "There goes Sid again" as he shuffled past the gate. The third man was slightly older and worked with the cattle. He was often loaned out to other farmers when they needed help. I was sitting in the wagon one day going back to the farm and I asked him why he was with the Guardianship Society. His reply was that as a young boy he had suffered from bad headaches. Mr grandfather and Mr WELLER, our immediate neighbour, were convinced there was nothing wrong with him, so much so that they approached the Society and he was released and ended up as a head cowman on Jersey.

Looking back now it feels as though the lads that were sent to the farms to work were little more than slaves without any rights, freedom, friends, family or pay. Their lives must have been very lonely and I feel ashamed to have witnessed their unhappiness in my younger days.

GILLIAN CAPON-BROWNING, [REDACTED]

## Beginnings In Family History

.....Geoff Bridger

A glance at our programmes show that many - nay surely most, family history talks at our meeting places appear to be on a great variety of interesting subjects only loosely, if at all, related to 'family history'. The reason is fairly obvious. Talks on "how to find your ancestors" are excellent for beginners but so many of our members are no longer beginners. For some reason, most probably the pace and demands of surviving modern life, few youngsters have the time to join us.

Talks on a specific family (no doubt 'your' family) are fascinating to that family but fairly boring to others unless there is some really grisly tale to tell. We have a quandary. How to further the interest in the general subject without boring the socks off the audience. General talks, with at least an element of potential family history seem to be the usual answer. That element may be specialist - such as my