

# Charcott, 'Where's That and Why?'

The Story of a Hamlet in the Parish of Leigh, Kent



Published by Leigh and District Historical Society in association with the  
Greyhound Inn, Charcott

*The cover picture shows the Greyhound Inn some time after the building of the taproom on the left, and judging by the clothing of the boy on the right, before WW1.*

## **Contents**

Foreword

Introduction and thanks

Why Charcott? – historical origins 1

Cometh the year, cometh the woman – Charcott starts to grow 7

What was it like to live in Charcott at that time? 10

Continuing occupational change 11

The Developing Community 13

    World War One 14

    Building in Charcott 14

    The Forge 15

    The Pub 16

    The Bakery 18

    The Farm 20

    The Airfield 22

    Knotley Hall and St Luke's 25

Growing up in Charcott 26

    Gillian Bamblett 26

    Barbara Bear 37

    Daisy Batchelor 28

    Russ Brown 28

    Rosa Gower 29

    Roy Grant 31

    Tim Jeffrey 31

    Angie Jenner 32

    Jean Lucas 33

    Roland 'Bonger' Pocock 33

    Mary Porch 34

    Audrey Stroud 35

Last Word 35

## **Foreword**

It has been a delight and real pleasure to have had the opportunity to be the latest in a long line of publicans as custodian of The Greyhound in Charcott. We, Richard and I, bought the pub freehold in early 2017, moving here from the neighbouring village of Weald. We had loved this little hamlet for a long time and were thrilled to become the new owners of a building that had such history at the heart of this community.

The chance to learn so much more through working with the Leigh Historical Society, in particular John Stevens, has been so interesting and we are very grateful for all that their research has brought to light. So many local people have been involved in sharing such wonderful memories of how and why the hamlet came about and The Greyhound really does continue now, just as it has over so many years, to bring people together, truly providing a hub of connection for many lovely local people.

We hope this book will be enjoyed by many who have visited here and enjoyed what Charcott has to offer; we are blessed to be in such a beautiful countryside spot yet so close to local towns. It's fascinating to learn why all roads led here and how people lived and worked as the community developed over the years, and the huge debt it owes to the formidable lady that was Avis Ingram, who built and ran The Greyhound alongside much of the 19th century Charcott.

Again, we thank the Leigh Historical Society for their work in bringing this together and are pleased to have been able to support them in production of this book. We hope you'll enjoy reading it and of course a visit to The Greyhound within the wonderful hamlet of Charcott that we call home!

**Fran Lee**

**Landlady, The Greyhound, Charcott**

## **Introduction and Thanks**

On a U3A walk along the route followed by mediaeval knights to resolve a boundary dispute concerning the Lowy (castle grounds) of Tonbridge, Chris Rowley, chair of the Leigh Historical Society got into conversation with Fran who with her partner Richard Lee had taken over the Greyhound in Charcott. Fran was interested in the history of the Inn and of Charcott.

Thus began an enquiry about a hamlet that previously had received very little attention. Charcott is in the parish of Leigh, some four miles west of Tonbridge. Leigh's history has been dominated by the owners of Hall Place at the centre and the powder mill industry at the other end of the parish. So, the first question was why Charcott? An initial review suggested that, when it was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pub served the occupants of a few cottages.

This booklet explains why the pub was built and how people lived their lives in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many of the 'old' families have now moved on but there are still people who have connections with Charcott, having grown up there, or had relatives who lived there and have contributed to this research, some being quoted at length. Contributions have also been extensively garnered from 'We had Everything', a collection of the memories of Leigh people pulled together and published by Chris Rowley, for which I am most grateful.

A list of contributors is to be found at the end of the booklet and Fran Lee of the Greyhound has been foremost in this regard. However, profound thanks are due to Rosa Gower who, as is explained within, grew up in Charcott and with her husband Steve delivered newspapers throughout the district for many years. Without her memory, her contacts and her collection of cuttings and photographs this booklet would have been very much slimmer! Any errors or omissions are my responsibility.

Charcott is only a hamlet on a side road off a byway, but I found a fascination in its long history and the story of its people. I hope you do too.

**John Stevens**

## Why Charcott?

The answer could be in the name. The spelling of the name has varied. On a 1769 map the hamlet is recorded as Charcate and by 1801 it had become Charket. It has been suggested that the 'char' comes from charcoal production. However, the likeliest explanation, by Professor Paul Cullen, is that in old English the name means a turning ('cerr') with a cottage.

The word 'camp' is also associated with Charcott, particularly in the names Camp Hill and Camp Hill Farm but so far no documentary evidence has been found of a camp, whether prehistoric, Roman or later. However, the late Patrick Hills is said to have remembered finding the remains of medieval buildings a little north and east of the Greyhound at the heart of the hamlet.

The answer to the question probably has to do with Charcott's position at a crossing of ancient tracks where a settlement developed and there was eventually sufficient traffic to justify the services of a blacksmith to shoe horses and the repair of the iron rims on the vehicles they drew.

A **trackway** through Charcott was almost certainly used in prehistoric times (roughly first century BC) to move iron or iron ore from the Weald, probably from Cowden area, to Oldbury, up above Ightham. It ran near Chiddingtone, through Charcott, then via what became known as 'Stanstrete' to what we now know as Watts Cross and then up through Underriver and Stone Street.

Later, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century Jutish period, **drove roads** were used in Autumn to bring animals down from the north of the 'lathe' to graze on acorns and beech mast in woods, known as 'dens'. One drove road came down from the north, through what is now Weald and on south to what later became Penshurst. Drove roads also ran west in the direction of what is now Edenbridge and along the old iron track to Cowden.

No doubt the exact position of the ancient trackways varied a little in direction over time but, once established, following the best and easiest routes through the Wealden forest, tended to continue to be used over many centuries. The north/south moving of herds of animals slowed down after 1066 and the dens became farms, manors and larger settlements. Instead, important landowners

used them to move between their different holdings. The Archbishop of Canterbury owned Otford Palace and his court moved between Otford and Penshurst. Owing a duty to the archbishop in 1284, tenants in an area named Karver, had a responsibility for carrying dishes, plates, cups and saucers between Penshurst and Otford. On the way, Charcott owed its allegiance to the lords of the Lowy of Tonbridge and not to the archbishop. For a long time Penshurst was known as Otford Weald and as such was recorded by Edward Hasted as late as 1800.

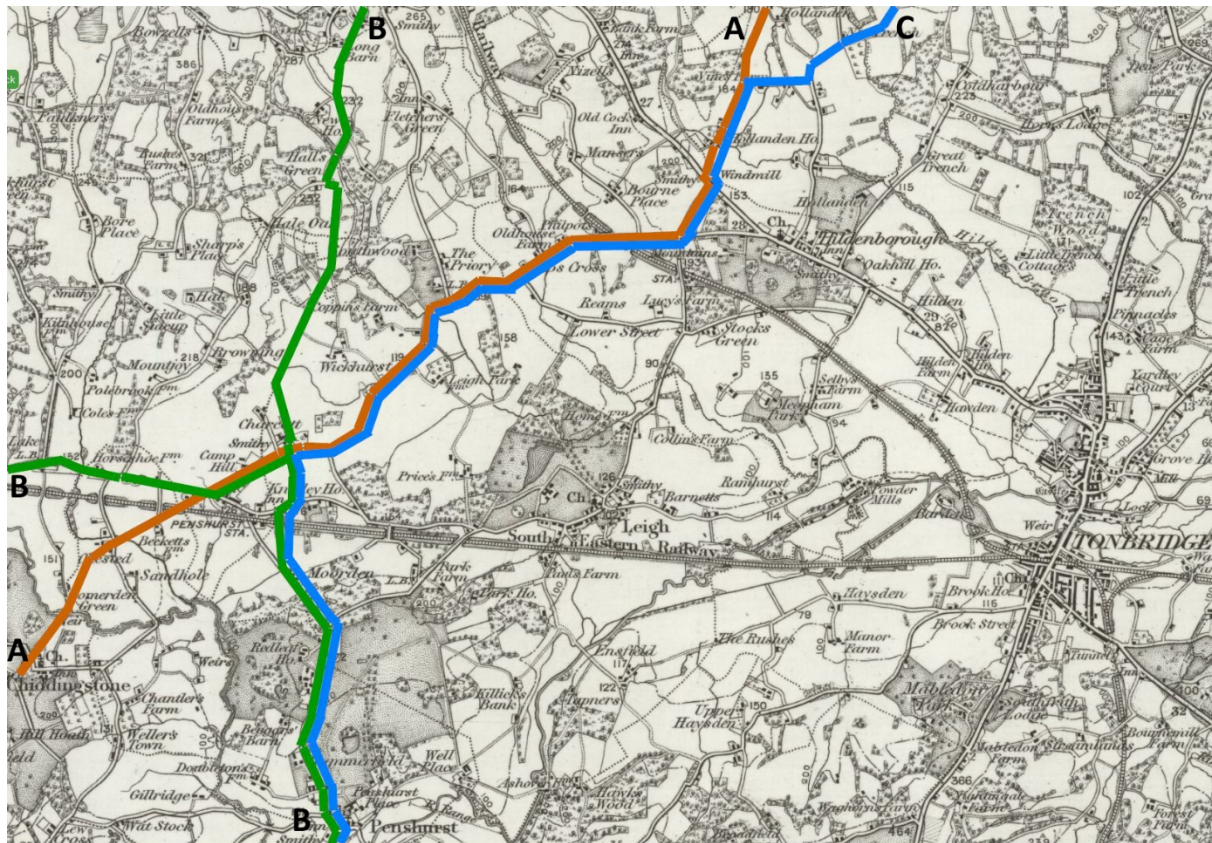
It is not known when its 'crossroad' position led to development at Charcott but there was clearly some potential from an early date. Charcott Farmhouse and Forge Cottage are thought to have origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Penshurst Place was built in 1341 and there is a report dated 3 November 1343 that Sir John Pulteney, owner of Penshurst, Ensfield and North Park (Leigh Park) manors, accused local men Laurence ate Hale, Thomas de Mordenn (Moorden), William de Mordenn and John de Chercot of breaking into his close at Leigh and taking 6 herons from his aviary. He also claimed that they had poached numerous hares, rabbits, pheasants and partridges from his woodland. Sir John said that the four men had attacked his servants who attempted to prevent the theft of his game. Several of the servants were injured, some so badly that they had been off work for some time. Sir John took his case to the King who had sent out officials to investigate.

There are a few other references to people who owned land in Charcott including William Rowe; William Seliard in 1579 and Wm Barr, a Mr St.John and Richard Turner in 1750; and Joseph Maynard who had let 11 acres to his son John and who had died in 1777. It is also known that the Children family owned land in Charcott in the 18 and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The land was sold when the Tonbridge Bank, in which George Children was a partner, was unable to pay its creditors in 1812.

The old drove road would probably have been the start of the fastest route to and from London for Sir John de Pulteney who in 1341 built Penshurst Place. Sir John was a merchant in the City and four time Lord Mayor of London. The same route would have been followed by the Sidney family who owned Penshurst Place from 1552. It has been suggested that the way from the north of Charcott, along the boundary of the Lowy and the parish, across the now



disused airfield to the south and then via the church and Moorden to Penshurst was known as the 'King's Highway', a reference back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. What became the airfield appears to have been part of a Royal Wood in Jutish times.



**Fig 1 Ways, Drovers and Turnpikes** A-A Iron Age track from Oldbury to Cowden via Underriver and Watts Cross (known as Hegstrast or high Street) to Chiddingstone Causeway, Chested, Somerden Green and Chiddingstone. B-B Jutish drove road from north of Sevenoaks, probably the Darenth Valley to Penshurst. There was also a connecting Jutish road. B-C heading west north of Edenbridge. B-C 19<sup>th</sup> century turnpike road ran from Penshurst via Charcott to Watts Cross and then to Shipbourne and on to Hadlow. (Copyright Ordnance Survey)

A 1769 map, Fig 2, shows **Halls Lane** going due north from Charcott to Halls Green, starting from the lane to the east of the bakery, and on to Weald. Halls Lane is not shown on post-1800 maps so it would seem to have stopped being used as a major routeway by that time. Much of the old track is still evident as a footpath which now starts up the lane to Charcott Farmhouse. However, the



importance of the Hall's Lane route must surely explain why the forge, built to service horses, carts and even carriages, came to be built there rather than directly on the east/west route.



**Fig 2 Andrews, Drury and Herbert map, 1769** – shows Halls Lane and some of the medieval buildings

Although there is no documentation to prove this, it seems certain that the Cowden to Watts Cross iron age track remained important and became the basis for a **turnpike** road built through Charcott in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Along with other local landowners, William Wells, who owned much of Charcott at that time, was a trustee of the body set up by a 1765 act of parliament for the purpose of repairing and improving the road. It seems likely that the

improvement of this road which fed into the turnpike between Tonbridge and Sevenoaks effectively made Halls Lane redundant and so it fell into disuse.

So, the answer to the question 'why Charcott' has to do with its key position as a crossing of ancient tracks that developed into roads. It could be argued that 'every village used to have a forge and a pub' but Charcott until the 1860s was scarcely a hamlet let alone a village. The medieval dwellings would have been built close to the tracks but it was the crossing that made it a prime site for the services of a smith to shoe horses and retyre the vehicles they drew.

**Just a hamlet** By 1840 much of the area was part of the Redleaf estate. Redleaf had been bought in about 1806 by William Wells, a shipbuilder on the Thames. In 1809 Wells bought land in the surrounding area including some in Charcott. In 1841, in addition to the forge, there were nine houses. Jessups, to the east, and Little Keepers (immediately to the west of the Greyhound) are hall houses built in 1389 and 1490 respectively. Charcott Farmhouse and Forge Cottage (split into two cottages and the basis of Camp Hill Farm) were built later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century but reputedly have much earlier origins. The pair of cottages known as Iris Cottages were built late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was also a pair of cottages near the corner southwest of Little Keepers but these were demolished before 1870. Wells owned Charcott Farmhouse, Little Keepers and the cottages on the corner, Forge Cottage and Jessups. Little Keepers and the other two cottages were owned by Thomas Waite.

There have been substantial alterations to all the houses over the years with chimneys being added and at times and all except Charcott Farmhouse have been split into more than one dwelling. Half of Jessups was burned down at some time and has been rebuilt in a different style.

The 1841 census returns show that at that time the farms were run by tenant farmer families: the Gassons and the Nyes. The Gasson household lived in Charcott Farmhouse. The two Nye families (the heads were father and son) lived in Forge Cottage and the son operated the forge. Charcott comprised eight households which included ten adult male agricultural labourers. The population was 58 in total, 35 males and 23 females. Five excavators were lodging in Charcott for a time and worked on the construction of the Tonbridge/Redhill railway which opened in 1842. The excavators lived in a

household 17 strong headed by John and Sophia Crowhurst and their three children with the Carters, Edward and Sophia and their three children and (presumably) their uncle George, as well as Richard and Mary Turner, both aged 70 years. Other than the excavators, the men worked as agricultural labourers.

Charcott was effectively a 'two-horse' hamlet, dependent on farming and the forge. The social and economic structure of the hamlet had hardly changed over many centuries. It consisted of tenanted farms run by extended families, servants and farm labourers living in tied accommodation and a tenanted forge run on the same basis. A picture of old England indeed.

In the 1851 census children up to the age of 13 were identified as scholars for the first time. The 1841 census had simply listed men, women and their children as agricultural labourers and undoubtedly, as until recently, all would have helped at particular times of the year. The opening of a school was a significant step forward but it is not clear whether this was at the Causeway or in Leigh. The total population had fallen in ten years from 58 to 44 in 1851 and it fell again in the next decade to 41 in 1861.

Little appeared to change in the 1850s and early '60s but in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century England was growing again. Technology had revolutionised agriculture and enabled the spread of the railways. It had created wealth and raised living standards for those lucky enough to benefit. Apart from agriculture and the forge, at the start of the '50s there were no other jobs in Charcott. But the opening of Penshurst station and goods yard would have made it easier to sell agricultural products from the farms and to obtain fuel and other goods. That things were stirring in Charcott is shown by the presence in a 1851 Post Office directory of a shopkeeper, Mrs Ann Martin, though she was not mentioned in the census. It seems likely that the shop was attached to No1 Iris Cottages. There were six agricultural labourers and two carters working on the farms in 1861 and no other occupations were recorded.

In 1847 the original William Wells died. His estate was left to two relatives including his great nephew, another William and a member of parliament who was resident at Redleaf in 1861. But the Wells family seemed not to have made great efforts to develop Charcott.

## **Cometh the year, cometh the woman**

In 1812 in Chiddingstone Avis Ingram had been born. She was the daughter of Richard and Jane Turner of 'Bassets' in Chiddingstone. They had five children. Richard was described as a 'yeoman' farmer. Avis married James, born 1809 in Penshurst. In 1851 the couple were living at Hoath Corner in Chiddingstone and James was working as a cricket ball maker. They too had five children, three boys and two girls. By 1861, James had died and Avis was working as a beerhouse keeper at the Kings Arms in Chiddingstone Causeway (the Station Inn, now the Little Brown Jug was a separate establishment). Her 20-year-old daughter, also called Avis, and working as a dressmaker was living with her, as was her granddaughter Ann, aged 3 years.

Richard Turner died in 1847 leaving legacies to each of his children. At some time in the previous five or so years he had purchased from Thomas Waite the cottages opposite the forge and two fields down the lane that had led to Weald, 4 acres in total. Richard left these holdings to James Glover and James Boakes in trust for Jane his widow for her lifetime. In 1864 Jane died and Glover sold the land to Avis. Given that the purchase included key sites in the centre of Charcott, it is interesting that Mr Glover, who in 1841 was a tenant of Mr Wells, was willing to sell to an in-comer. However, The Kings Arms, which Avis had previously managed, was owned by William Wells and this suggests that the transaction had the blessing of Mr Wells. As Figure 3 shows, by the time of the 1871 census, in a whirlwind of activity, Avis had built, and become the beerhouse keeper of, what was even then called, the Greyhound and had built the four Green Cottages and the five cottages in a terrace down the lane at New Town. This brought the number of habitable buildings (some split in two) from 7 in 1861 to about 15 in 1871.

A puzzle relates to the name New Town. When and why was this name chosen and why was there no subsequent building 'up the lane' to justify such a title? However, it seems that there was a fashion at the time to use this title for new and somewhat detached buildings.



**Fig 3 Ordnance survey Map of Charcott 1866-69, published 1871 – shows Avis Ingram’s buildings: the Greyhound, Green Cottages and New Town to the north. (Copyright Ordnance Survey)**

It appears that the new houses were specifically built to accommodate the expanding population of labourers. Between 1861 and 1871 the number of households increased from seven to twenty and the population from 41 to 100. There were 58 male and 42 female residents. There were many new jobs and new occupations. The new jobs included two bricklayers, one joiner, two cricket ball makers, a ‘bakeress’, a domestic servant, two dressmakers and a housekeeper. There were six farm labourers. Startlingly, and for the first time, there were general labourers in Charcott, 30 in total. But there is a puzzle: what work were the labourers doing? Why had Avis Ingram embarked on such a radical building programme and why did she think there was a need for so many general labourers? And was she their employer? Clearly, something big was going on.



Avis appeared to have had considerable business acumen. She financed some at least of the new building by selling land around New Town to John Moyce but she raised far more when, in 1874 she sold New Town Cottages and the fields together with Green Cottages to Frank Hills. In 1870 Frank Hills had bought the Redleaf estate including the holdings in Charcott from William Wells MP. Hills was an industrial chemist from South London whose firm processed the waste products from the production of town gas and expanded into the shipbuilding business on the north bank of the Thames. Frank and his wife Ann may have been living at Redleaf for some part of each year and they lived there permanently from the mid-1880s.

The fact is that we do not know why so many labourers were living in Charcott in 1871. At that time, eleven households out of a total of twenty had general labourers at their head. But what were they doing? The building developments in Charcott required labour but it had been completed by 1871. There was also some building work at Redleaf. The North Lodge was completed in 1872. However, Historic England say that the previous Georgian building was not demolished until 1883 and a new gothic style mansion was not erected until 1884. Extensive landscaped gardens followed. However, the labourers who had moved into Charcott in the 1860s had largely gone by 1881. In 1881 and 1891 there was an increase in the number of agricultural labourers in the census, and they could well have been working on the Redleaf estate, but a comparison of the names shows that few of them had been living in Charcott in 1871

Knotley Hall was built sometime between 1855 and 1868. Lawrence Biddle's book says that it had been built in 1859. The 1871 ordnance survey records a substantial building on the ground by 1866/69. It was not until the 1881 census that the Hall was shown to be occupied by a Lady Harriett Warde and a substantial household. So, it is possible that the Charcott labourers were building at Knotley Hall but, if so, would they have been recorded as general labourers in the 1871 census?

So, the question remains: what were the 30 labourers doing around 1870? Whatever it was, they had almost all gone by 1881. All but one of the five individuals who remained worked as agricultural/park labourers.

**What was it like to live in Charcott at that time?** Documentary evidence is poor but there was clearly no mains electricity or drainage at that time and water would have been supplied from wells using pumps. Water can be found fairly near the surface in the area. Housing would have been cramped and often inhabited by more than one family.

For instance, in 1871, **Avis Ingram** at the Greyhound was a widow, aged 57 years, who lived with her two daughters, the younger one being at school, three general labourers, two bricklayers and a cricket ball maker. Nine in total.

At the same time, **Edward Carter**, a widower aged 65 years was a labourer who probably lived in one of the cottages, built two rooms upstairs and two down. He lived with his daughters, one aged 12 who was at school, another aged 13 who was his housekeeper, and yet another aged 21, a dressmaker, a son aged 19, a labourer, and two lodgers who were both labourers. Seven in total.

Also, **Rebecca Moyce**, aged 45 years, a widow (possibly the widow of John Moyce above) and a 'bakeress' lived with one son, aged 17 a farm labourer, boy twins aged 11, girl twins aged 8, another daughter aged 5, and a son aged 1 year old. Eight in total. She probably lived in what is now 1 Iris Cottages which had attached, between it and the Greyhound, a shop with ladder access to a first-floor store/possible sleeping space.

So, life was hard. This is clear but what is less clear is whether, compared with Leigh or Tonbridge, there was relative poverty in Charcott at that time. Some clue can be found because in the 1851 census only two paupers were listed in Charcott: David Stone aged 74, an agricultural labourer and widower; and Lucy Latter aged 68, the widow of an agricultural labourer, living with her son John. They would have been receiving Poor Law support - outdoor relief - they were not living in a workhouse. Subsequently the label 'pauper' was not used in censuses. Instead, before the days of state pensions, older people who were



not working were often shown as being supported by members of their families. There were three such in 1881, and one each in 1891 and 1901.

Apart from any government support, Leigh had a number of charities to help those in need. One was the Leigh Coal Fund, created in the 1840s to bring coal to the parish and give it to the 'most needy and sick poor' and sell at half market price to other parishioners. The coal was transported from the railway goods yard, 33 tons by each of a number of farmers including Richard Gasson from Charcott. How many Charcott people benefitted is not known but David and Lucy could well have done so. The Coal Fund was taken over by Leigh United Charities and in living memory Eddie Gasson, who was the sole remaining member in Charcott of the family that had managed Charcott Farm in the 1840/50s, is said to have received help to augment his pension. Eddie received a state pension by post in the form of a cheque so did not go to the local post office to draw his money out and so the extent of his income was not known to the trustees of the Coal Fund. Because his neighbour, a lady, drew her pension at the post office the trustees had her 'on their list' and she had benefitted. The consternation that would have resulted when Eddie found out his neighbour was getting help that he wasn't can only be imagined. So Eddie applied direct and got help.

**Continuing occupational change** By 1881 population growth had come to a stop. Charcott still comprised 20 households, 52 each male and female residents. William Huntley had been brought-in as bailiff to run the farms. As well as a shepherd, and one woman who 'worked on a farm', there were 16 agricultural labourers. There were also a bricklayer's labourer, a turnpike labourer, a telegraph labourer, a park labourer, a gardener, a gamekeeper and one general labourer. There were seven cricket ball and one cricket bat makers. Women earned, one each, as a dressmaker, housekeeper, and domestic servant. Rebecca Moyce 'had charge of Mission Room', though it is not clear whether this was in Charcott. Avis Ingram ran the beer house assisted by one male domestic servant. Four Nyes, John with his wife Fanny, Alfred, Henry and William ran the forge

In 1891 there were nineteen households occupied by 38 males and 40 females, so domestic life was not as crowded. There were sixteen agricultural/farm

labourers, a railway labourer, and one other unspecified. There were three cricket ball makers.



**Fig 4 Bill Skinner, a closer, holing the cover of a cricket ball, about 1970**

1891 was a significant year because in the April Avis Ingram, who had been running the Greyhound helped by her grand-daughter Alice Winter and with the help of a servant, Mary Pocock, sold the pub to Kelsey's, brewers from St John's, Tunbridge Wells. She cleared her debts and was left with Iris cottages next door, one occupied by Thomas and Ann Winter and the other by John and Anne Pocock. Each family had six children. Not long after Avis died In November 1894 leaving £1335.

**Early twentieth century** In 1901 the number of households was 19 but the population had fallen to 94, 51 males and 43 females. The number of labourers had fallen: there were only 3 farm labourers and 1 bricklayer's labourer. There were 5 cricket ball makers. Women earned: one as a housekeeper and another a dressmaker. There was also a retired laundress. Five men worked on the railway telegraph system. There was also one engine cleaner, who presumably

worked on the railway. There were two gardeners and a gamekeeper, a carter and his mate and one coal porter.

In 1911, there were 29 households, including 5 licensed hawkers living in vans, 5 men, 5 women and 9 children. The total was 145, 85 males and 56 females. There was further diversification of jobs including a packing case maker, 3 fencers and a brick and pot maker. Edwin Styles and his wife Sarah were running the Greyhound. No farmer is mentioned in the census.

**Thus far** In seventy years, Charcott changed from an agricultural hamlet to one with a wide range of manual occupations. From virtually no non-agricultural jobs in 1841, by 1911 there were four non-agricultural jobs for every one directly involved in farming. Much of Charcott was still owned by one family, though a different one. And whereas in 1841 almost the whole population of Charcott depended for their living on the Redleaf estate, by the turn of the century this was no longer the case and, rather than being tied cottages, many would have been rented from the Hills family. The number of houses had gone up from 8 to 21 though mains services did not arrive for almost fifty years. The population had increased from 58 to 145. The expansion of the population was the result of households taking in lodgers and additional accommodation in caravans.

By her enterprise Avis Ingram had changed the face of Charcott.

## **The Developing Community**

Since the 1850s Charcott and its people had changed considerably. Detailed census information, as used to tell the story so far, is not available for most of the 20th century but the memories of those who grew up in the hamlet and the memories handed down to them by parents and grandparents help to fill in the gaps. A way to tell the tale is to follow the development of some of the businesses and other activities.

**Charcott Families** Some families lived for decades in Charcott. The Gassons were present through from 1841 to 1988. Nyes were resident well into the 1920s. Others including Latter, Ingram, Moyce, Staples and Young stayed for a time. Some families that had lived in Charcott pre-first world war were still

there, or had come back, after the second world war. In 1952 these names included Brooker, Eade, Gasson, Latter, Pocock, Seal and Winter.

**World War One took its toll** Though some stayed in reserved occupations to work the farms or carried out other essential services, Charcott men enlisted or were called-up and served in the forces. Three men died: Mark (Ernest) Young who in 1901 was a carter's mate; Sidney Pocock, recorded as being 9 years old in Charcott in 1901; and Victor Ready who had been working as a domestic house boy and living with his aunt and uncle in 1911.

**Building in Charcott** was spasmodic. From eight habitable buildings and the forge and various other outbuildings in the 1840s, the following additions were made.

1860s	Greyhound; New Town Cottages, 5 units; and Green Cottages, 4 Units
By 1895	Charcott Place, 1 unit
1900	Bakery
1939	New Cottages, 2 units
1948	Bungalows of prefabricated construction, 10 units; and Orchard Cottages, four semi-detached houses along Camp Hill Road and two south of New Cottages, 12 units.
1950s	Primrose Cottage, now Primrose House, 1 unit
1970s	Bungalows replaced by two semi-detached houses next to Forge House, 4 units, and apartments opposite, 8 units
1980s	Charcott Farm conversion, 5 additional units
2010	5-8 Green Cottages, 4 units



rubber tyres, the blacksmith would renew the steel rims on wooden wheels and the water pits which had been used to cool the hot rims and stop the wood from catching fire were only filled in in 1992 by Nick Grantham. In the 1950s horses were still used to pull vans and carts and they needed to be re-shod periodically. *Roy Grant* remembered winter days spent pumping the bellows at the forge for Mr Skinner's roaring fire. 'He made horseshoes and repaired the ironwork on farm implements. He also made iron hoops which we ran behind for miles'. Shoeing involved some trimming of hooves and *Rosa Gower* remembers her dog 'Smudge' scavenging for parings, which she says smelled awful, to chew at his leisure back home. The Skinner family also managed forges at Penshurst and Bough Beech. Rosa called Mr Skinner a 'snob' but so did everyone else; at the time 'snob' was slang for blacksmith. Smithing was a thirsty job and it is said that 'Pimpo' Skinner used to sneak over to the pub and pay his son a penny not to tell his mother.

**The Pub** The Greyhound, under its first owner Avis Ingram, is said to have been given its name as a tribute to Henry VIII who married Anne Boleyn from nearby Hever Castle and whose favourite dog was reputed to be the greyhound. There is a story that in the early 1900s, under the influence of Frank Hills' son Arnold, who was President of the National United Temperance Council, the Station Inn at Chiddingstone Causeway had been turned into a temperance inn, and Arnold wanted the beerhouse in Charcott to stop selling beer. It is said that Arnold was 'surprised' to find that this was the only freehold in the hamlet that the family did not own and so they could not shut it down.

By 1901 Avis had been succeeded by her second cousin Annie Draper and it was in 1904 that a taproom, scullery and woodshed were added on the west side of the building. Edwin Walter Styles took over the pub in 1905/6 and ran it into the 1920s.

In the 1930s the Greyhound was run by Eli Baker and then by Wm Henry and Walter Morgan. Daisy Batchelor remembered a beagle pack meeting at the Greyhound in the 1930s 'so we'd all go off with our sandwiches and lemonade. We were really tired at the end of the day'. In WW2, apart from the dangers of bombs, damaged aircraft and stray barrage balloons, the pub benefitted from the patronage of soldiers and others engaged on the airfield. Post war, the pub

was run by Jessie Worthington. Her husband Thomas, daughter Evelyn and Evelyn's husband Albert Lucas assisted. The pub's sign was designed by Albert and Evelyn and pictures Connie, their greyhound. They left in 1956. It is thought that the plain frontage of the pub was replaced by the current two bays in the post-war period.

In the 1970/80s the Greyhound was run by Lloyd and Hilda Delve. It had been a 'social pub, allowing all comers, except children, who played outside and, a sign of the times, gypsies; there was a sign on the door saying 'no gypsies'. The Greyhound was the key place for socialising, at least for Charcott men. Some were sufficiently regular patrons that they had their own chair. Eddie Gasson was one such. He was proud and, like many in those days, had to be careful with his cash and *Gillian Bamblett* remembers Eddie swapping the rhubarb he had grown for cigarettes at the bakery. Darts, dominoes, and card games were still important pub activities; indeed, Angie Jenner remembers being first reserve on the men's darts team that toured the area challenging other pub teams.

Barry and Gina Garner took over in January 1980 and it is believed that this was when bar meals started to be a significantly more important part of the pub's offer. Gina particularly remembers Rosa Gower's father Ted Winter as a sufficiently regular patron and gentleman that he taught her daughter Kyla, aged four, to read. He, in turn, was so fond of Barry and Gina that after Saturday evening forays with his chums down to the Bat and Ball in Leigh, he would sing 'goodnight my lovelies' through the pub's letterbox on his return to Charcott.

Alan and Gill Langton took over as managers in about 1985. The Langtons were in charge in 1989 when Ted Winter celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and was given a present of a voucher for 80 pints of cider (a sort of credit on which he could draw over time) by the brewery. There was a challenge at around this time when May Everest (nee Pearson) said that 'they were thinking of extending the Greyhound to make a restaurant'... 'I told them to look at the deeds. When they did ,they found' that 'it's got to be kept as a place for working men'. It is not clear that this objection put much of a spoke in the wheel.



From 1991/2 until 2003, the Greyhound was run by Arthur and Mary Tabrett who had moved to Kent after farming in Tenerife. Mary cooked and Arthur ran the front house. The pub gained a reputation for its food, drawing patrons from as far as South London. They had a steak and kidney pudding evenings and for a special occasion chateaubriand was on the menu. But their daughter Caroline says that the work and success took its toll. After an exhausting bank holiday Sunday Mary came back from the hairdresser in Leigh to find that, together with the keys, there was a note on the bar concerning the next delivery of beer and the accounts and saying goodbye.

Between 2003 and 2016 Tony and Allison French were the managers, finishing on the August bank holiday weekend. Larkins brewery kept the doors open, supplying their beer from Sept 2016 to Jan 2017 and, with help, offered the occasional fish and chip evening with puddings cooked and served by regular patrons. then the Greyhound closed. Fran and Richard purchased the pub from Enterprise Inns at end of March 2017 and opened again in mid July 2017 after refurbishment.

**The Bakery** Trade directories show Ann Martin acting as a shopkeeper in Charcott in the 1850s and she was succeeded by William Martin in the 1860s but neither are recorded in census returns so may not have lived on the premises. It is not known what was being sold but it may be surmised that this included foods, materials and small implements not being produced on the farms. This may have included bread but Charcott's first baker, described in the census returns as a 'bakeress', was Rebecca Moyce in the 1870s. By about 1900 the present bakery had been built and in 1911 George Gosling was recorded as a baker in residence, working with his wife Elizabeth and his father, also named George. By 1913 Malcolm Christie had taken over and in 1918 he was succeeded by William Grayland.



**Fig 6 William Grayland, holding a book, outside the bakery, probably 1918**

William had worked as a gardener and then in WW1 had ridden horses drawing gun carriages. He had a limp as a result of injuries to his leg which had been trapped between the side of the horse he rode and a pole used to draw the carriage. *Audrey Stroud*, his granddaughter, says that he originally worked for Mr Christie and took over from him, debts and all, when the business owed money to the flour millers. William Grayland married Maud Pocock and ran the bakery until the mid-1950s when his sons Norman and Stanley gradually took over. Audrey particularly remembers going up to the bakery at weekends to watch her uncles working. One of her jobs was rolling hot doughnuts in sugar. She did this with bare hands 'which could only be licked clean when the job was done'. After WW2 the Graylands were the only people in Charcott with motor transport and *Rosa Gower* recalls that, as a treat, they took local children out on the delivery rounds, 'sitting at the back of the van with legs trailing in the wind'.

As well as bread, the bakery made cakes and sold sweets, and dried and tinned foods. Cakes and puddings were made to order for Christmas and weddings and special loaves were baked for harvest festivals. In addition, 4lb loaves (the normal weight was 2lb) were baked in specially made tins for a family with thirteen children, the Broads at Little Moorden, who had two of these loaves every two days. In the 1960s the bakery suffered competition from low-cost

bread from supermarkets and the business was sold to Rupert Gardener in 1968. Subsequently of course artisan bakery again became popular.

*Gillian Bamblett* recalls a hatch set in the floor of the larder in the bakery that covered a stream running from a spring-fed pond just north behind the Greyhound. She was told that it was possible to catch fish through the hatchway. The bakery had a cellar that was rumoured to be connected to one under the Greyhound and in very wet weather the cellar would flood. The stream was said to lead across the fields underground and feed a pond on the Causeway.

**The Farm** The Gassons and Nyes had lost their farm tenancies from William Wells in the 1860s and by 1871 William Huntley had taken over as bailiff for the amalgamated farm. The Huntleys lived at Charcott Farmhouse into the 1890s. In 1901 William Faircloth and his wife Lucy were working the farm and this tenancy (they had a son also named William who worked with them on the farm) lasted until 1932. Another son Alfred Faircloth took over in 1922. Alfred and his wife Jessie's daughter *Barbara*, who later married Philip Bear, described the farm as 'mixed' with some corn, an orchard 'with apples, pears and plums' and cows providing milk for Charcott people. They had a nuttery and sold the cobnuts to Mr Webber who had a nursery at the bottom of Quarry Hill in Tonbridge.

The farm covered fifteen fields around Charcott and was run by Alfred, two cowmen and a carter (a Mr Austin, Mr Humphrey and Buck Winter are names Barbara remembered). They had two cart horses, 'Capt'n' and 'Colonel'. The cows were milked by hand. Come the harvest a threshing machine was hired, run by two tough men who 'always seemed full of drink - cider'. 'All of Charcott' helped with haymaking, some bringing guns to bag rabbits. The Faircloths had to leave the farm; 'in 1932 the hop market was very bad, nothing was earned and they had 'spent a good deal of money on wiring (the framework on which hops are grown)'.

Richard and Clarisse Porch took over in 1932. *Mary Porch* said that her family moved from Somerset to Kent (when she was three) because the proximity of the London market meant that 'the milk price in Kent was higher' and they could make a better living. They had loaded their cows, sheep and hens onto a

train to carry them to Kent. Because the Porchs were more diverse in their farming activities and were able to ride the markets. Mary's mother managed the hens and sold eggs to a wholesaler in Wadhurst. Her father sold milk round the hamlet from a churn carried on a small milk float. Mary and her brother Richard's arms would ache churning milk to make butter for the house and they were not allowed to stop until the job was done. Her father reared turkeys for the Christmas trade.

*Alf Anderson* recalled that, at the beginning of the war his family moved to Charcott: 'We lived at 1 Orchard Cottage, which was half of what it is now Jessups 'although it's been extended a lot. Father looked after the cows for Mr Porch but as it was only a small farm, he did a bit of everything. Mr Porch was tall and gaunt, and Mrs Porch was round and jolly but they were both very nice people, very easy going'.

Mary Porch's farming life at Charcott Farmhouse lasted until 1989 when, suddenly, her brother died while milking the cows. Mary could not continue on her own and the business was wound-up. Ginny, nee Hills, and Nick Morris took over the farmhouse and Mary lived for some years in The Granary.

**Football** was hugely important. Until after WW2 the Charcott team played over the lane on the field to the southwest of the Greyhound. The pub provided washing facilities: a tin bath outside the 'tap' room to get the worst mud off before players moved inside to quench their thirst, a process that often lasted until closing time. Later, they played on a field over the back of Charcott Place, the home of the schoolteacher Miss Heighes. Beatrice Heighes was a keen supporter and manager of the team and for some time secretary of the local league in which they competed. In 1947 she was awarded an MBE for services to education. *Bongor Pocock* recalls that his first sight of a football match, in about 1950, was in that field. For away matches a bus was hired, driven by a Mr Scrace from Speldhurst.



**Fig 7 Charcott Football Club 1950s**

*Back row from left, Miss Heighes, Les Brooker, Brian Gower, Ron Emslie, Bill Emslie, Roy Slack, Arthur Winter, Rev Ellis*

*Front row, not known, Tony Gower, Ron Latter, Ted Winter, John Skinner*

From 1920 **Stoolball** was an important sport for Charcott girls. They played on the cricket ground at the Causeway. In 1923 Fay Styles from Charcott played for Kent.

**The Airfield and the Second World War** In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the development of the fields south of Charcott as an airfield changed their primary use. The airfield, was originally used during the First World War. There were two aeroplane sheds and other buildings but after the war the airfield closed and the buildings were dismantled. However, it is possible that the field was used occasionally and it has been suggested that in the 1920s, Winston Churchill used the airfield when he rented Lullenden Manor, near Dormansland.





**Fig 8 Charcott Stoolball Team about 1959**

*Back row, from left Mary Winter, Brenda Stroud, Jean Bear, Mary Miles, Mil Mew, Sid Mew*

*Middle row Grace Reid, Vi Stroud, May Everest, Sue Pockcock, Joan McNeish*

*Front row Joyce Broad, Rosa Winter*

During the 1930s the airfield was opened as a civil landing ground. Planes from London's (only) Croydon airport to Paris followed the railway lines down to the Kent coast. Les Brooker worked part time on the airfield and said that when a plane was due to pass over a telegraph message would be sent to clear the sheep off the landing strip in case it needed to be used. He also observed that so many aircraft used the strip that he had seen up to sixteen airliners in the field at one time. Passengers would get off and head back to Croydon from the up-side platform at Chiddingstone Causeway station which was consequently much better appointed than the down platform. Unloaded, the planes would take off when repaired or the weather had improved.

A particular attraction is said to have been demonstrations and short trips provided by Sir Alan Cobham's 'Flying Circus'. Between the wars the airfield was also used as a polo field. The then Prince of Wales, later briefly Edward

VIII, kept his ponies with Captain Butler at Whitepost Farm and *Bongor Pocock* recalls being told that Mrs Simpson, the Prince's paramour twice visited to watch matches.

In the Second World War the airfield was re-activated and saw many forced landings of British and some German planes. All this caused excitement among the younger residents of Charcott. While Charcott children were not evacuated during the war some evacuees were lodged in the hamlet, a couple with Mrs Gibbs. *Alf Anderson* saw a Messerschmidt strafing the gun emplacements on the airfield when a Spitfire arrived and fired on it. The damaged Messerschmidt landed and then the Spitfire pilot realized he'd run out of fuel and he landed too. Alf said 'I ran over to see if I could be the first to the German pilot but then I thought he might have a revolver or something and thought better of it and left it to the army people'. *Colin Burchett* remembered when, crossing the footpath over the airfield on the way to Sunday school in the Church, 'a German fighter came across the airfield and machine gunned us; we ran like hell and got to the farm next to the Church, and Mum must have been aware of the situation as she also ran across the aerodrome to find out if we were OK'.

*Rosa Gower's* father Ted remembered sheltering in the cellar under the bakery during bombing raids in WW2. She recalls that a 17-year-old German pilot had crash landed on the airfield and, very frightened, he was captured and given 'a cup of tea and a fag'. Children regarded the airfield as a playground and Rosa recalls having her picture taken sitting, with other children, along the side of one wing of an aircraft. Canadian airmen were based at the field and one or two married local girls.

*Lucille Baker's* (now Mrs Wade) mother and father had met during the War when her mother was in the Red Cross working with the US Army. In 1952 her mother obtained a job as cook at Knotley Hall. The family moved to No. 2, The Street, Charcott. Her father worked for Kent County Council. He had been an American GI, but Lucille never remembers any anti-American feeling. 'He was huge and white haired and smoked a big cigar'.

A wartime tale is told by *Angie Jenner*. Her mother Ethel had grown up in Weald and in the early part of the war had been in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) working as a cook. Ethel said that one day she was picked up by two staff sergeants, bundled into a car and carried off. Where she was going



she did not know. And when she protested, they expressed surprise, said 'don't you know?', and told her she was going to Chartwell, the country home of Winston Churchill. She served there for some years and then went to Downing Street and after the war worked for the Attlees. At Chartwell, she served tea and on one occasion had taken the tea tray into what she thought was an empty room. Spotting a box of chocolates, then normally impossible to buy, she was tempted and grabbed one only to hear a voice from a deeply winged chair say 'so you like chocolate?'. Shortly after a box of chocolates was sent to her home. After the war, wanting somewhere of their own to live, her mother had approached the local MP and mentioned her war time service. The council house in Charcott had always been considered a direct reward.

To this day, the airfield may be used for emergency landings. *Gillian Bamblett* remembers, in the mid-1960s, a biplane landing, taxiing to a halt near her house, the pilot emerging in leathers, flying helmet and gloves asking 'where am I?'.

**Knotley Hall and St Luke's Church** Across the airfield from Charcott lay Knotley Hall which from 1937 operated as an approved school for boys under the auspices of the Children's Aid Society and then Barnardo's until it came under the wing of the Kent County Council and finally closed in 1991. *Angie Jenner* remembers a few incidents involving the boys but generally relations were good. The boys' gym team provided demonstrations for St Luke's Church fetes and one of the masters organised young people's pantomimes and plays. *Rosa Gower* remembers Knotley Hall with some affection. The Hall had sports and other facilities that they encouraged local residents to use. Some of the boys sang in the church choir and one or two married local girls. Rosa sympathised with problems many had endured back home in London.

*Gillian Bamblett* was one of two girls who found the idea of joining the choir attractive partly because ten of the other members were boys from Knotley Hall. Unfortunately, and perhaps because sermons were not always engaging, diversions emerged including, in the autumn, the 'roasting' of chestnuts on the hot water pipes running past the choir stalls. One nut spent too long on the hot pipe, exploded, and hit the vicar on the back of the neck. At that moment he did not flinch but after the service gave the young members of the choir a roasting.

## **Growing-up in Charcott**

It would be right to envisage Charcott through to the mid-twentieth century as a fairly close-knit community with a core of families that stayed for two, three or even more generations. But being born and brought up in the hamlet did not mean staying in Charcott. Neither jobs nor houses were guaranteed. Young people had to look outside just to get employment. Consequently, there are many people who left the hamlet but still have fond memories of the Charcott they knew.

**Gillian Bamblett nee Grayland** Born in 1954, Gillian was the daughter of Stanley and Marjory (nee Rawlings) and the youngest of William and Maud Grayland's grandchildren. Her elder siblings were Christine and Stephen.

Stanley's father had arranged for him to take an apprenticeship in baking and confectionery. His work in the bakery started at 5.00am. Later in the day, about 2.00pm, Stanley would go out on the round delivering bread, cakes and dried and tinned food to customers in Leigh and Hildenborough. His brother went the other way to Four Elms and Bough Beech. But that was not all. Earlier at 7.00am, Stanley would have left the bakery to go Knotley House where he worked as a chef preparing breakfasts for the boys. He would be joined by Marjory to cook lunch and she would stay on the prepare teas.

It might be thought that this left their young children 'at risk' but they were looked after by Mr and Mrs Gibb at No 3 Green Cottages. Generally, this worked well but Gillian seemed to be accident prone. Aged two and a half she fell into a pond. There were no adults around and she could have drowned were it not for two things: her rubber pants outside terry towel nappies and the air they trapped made her bouyant; and her brother Stephen aged 5years who dragged her out.

From a young age the children were expected to help around the bakery and shop. Indeed, their pocket money depended on it. Her brother loathed the job of greasing tins with lard before baking. One of Gillian's first jobs was putting the jam into doughnuts. She had a spoon with a sharpened handle which was inserted into the doughnut and worked round to create a cavity. Greaseproof paper was formed into a cone, the end was cut off and the jam as squeezed into the hole before the whole thing was rolled in sugar. That was a safe

operation. More difficult was a job carried out last thing at night when flour was shot, from the floor above, down a canvas tube into the huge mixing bowl with its single paddle. The children controlled the bottom of the tube, letting it go and then tightening it when the right amount of flour had been delivered. Unfortunately, the young Gillian was too short to do this without having a tin to stand on to lean out over the bowl. Inevitably, one day, the tin slipped and so did Gillian landing her in the bowl, covered with flour. She says her father came roaring down the stairs shouting 'why did you let go?' before realising what had happened. The pressure of work in the bakery was such that their father never took a holiday. But their mother took one summer week off a year and every day they would get on the train to Tonbridge in order to catch a coach and go off to the seaside at Margate or along the South Coast.

When older, Gillian joined the games in the street and trips out through the fields to Gassons Wood to make camps and, with the other girls collect primroses in Spring to bind with wool and take to elderly ladies in Charcott. Haymaking was fun. The hay was cut, baled, and left to dry and that was when the children pounced using the bails to make castles and dens. In due course, the farmer came back for his hay and the children helped to load it up and climbed on top for the trip towards Edenbridge. Having unloaded the farmer brought them back.

**Barbara Bear** aged three, and nicknamed 'Barley', moved with her father Alfred and mother Jessie Faircloth to Charcott Farm in 1922. She went to the Causeway school for two years and then to a convent in Tonbridge. She knew all the local children and because of her name, Faircloth, was ironically (cruelly we would now think) known as 'old Dirty Rags'. Her father had farmed at Great Barnetts and accidentally shot himself in the foot and lost his leg. He got up to light the fires at 5.30 every morning but 'even when the fires were going the farmhouse was terribly cold'. There were brick floors and just a pump for water in the kitchen. He was 'very easy going' and seemed not bothered by fruit being stolen from the orchard. Gypsies sometimes stayed in the Orchard and their children went to the Causeway school. 'The men would do all the dirty jobs no one else wanted to do and the women made clothes pegs and baskets and those wooden flowers. They used to come and ask for water. But in those days nobody minded gypsies – they were just part of country life.'

After leaving Charcott and growing up in Leigh, Barbara married Philip Bear and for a while they came back to Charcott, living at 1 Charcott Cottages in 1952.

**Daisy Batchelor, nee Kemp**, was seven when she moved to Charcott in 1927 with her parents. Her father worked as a stockman for John Day at Camp Hill Farm. Their cottage backed onto the Faircloth farm and she painted a picture of an idyllic childhood fishing in ponds with a bent pin and string, playing with iron hoops and skipping ropes, whipping tops, dolls and prams. Charcott was a friendly place with no cars and 'we'd play hockey in the road with a walking stick and tennis ball'. Daisy used to help at the bakery 'two doors away from us' and she was a member of the girl guides and the choir at St Lukes. Daisy left home aged fourteen to work in domestic service in Penshurst.

**Russ Brown** Born 1942, in Wick after his father had been called-up, on returning south after the war, Russ and his family found that their home in Bermondsey had been bombed. The alternative accommodation found for them was in one of the Council Cottages where he lived from 1950 to 1954 with his mother Dorothy and father George.

Russ says that he hated school. In particular, he hated Miss Heighes who he says insisted on teaching the boys to dance with each other rather than with girls. Russ had a problem with some adult ladies: he loved going down to New Town and then climbing into the field on the left to play around the rabbit warren. Unfortunately, the spot he chose was in sight of Mrs Porch on the one side and Miss Heighes on the other at Charcott Place. One or other of the ladies was bound to send him home with a flea in his ear.

He particularly remembers Eddie Gasson who worked making fencing near Hildenborough Station. He said that Eddie used to talk to himself as he walked along. He was 'really scary' until you knew him and then you realised 'what a nice bloke he was'. Another character he describes is Sid Gibbs who was responsible for tanning the leather used for making cricket balls. Sid offered to teach Russ to swim but his training technique consisted of urging him to jump into a pool and sink or swim.

Russ was intrigued by the gypsies who made periodic visits to Charcott. It was a relationship of admiration and awe. It started when he watched as a caravan

approached Charcott from the direction of Wickhurst. As they went past, someone tossed what appeared to be a parcel, a present even, but turned out to be the boiled remains of a sheep's skull. He was wary of the gypsies and was around when a fight broke out in the Greyhound in which gypsies and the local policeman Steve Stevens were involved. In spite of his fears, Russ would sneak out in the evening to hide under the gypsy caravans to observe their activities; to this day he does not know why he was not attacked by their dogs.

Russ left Charcott in 1954 but, coming back to Weald to live in 1960, he came down to Charcott and the Greyhound quite frequently. He remembers the landlords at that time who were often enthusiastic drinkers themselves. Russ was a carpenter and got involved in maintenance and other projects including the installation of two new fireplaces and a woodburning stove. The stove had to be collected from Heathfield, an errand that involved the landlord, Lloyd Delve together with Russ and Ted Winter. Russ describes a lengthy trip punctuated by stops at pubs on the way. At one pub, one of the pilgrims finished off a part full bottle of rum and claimed to have drunk the pub out of rum!

**Rosa Gower.** For forty-eight years from 1970 Rosa and her husband Steve delivered newspapers in the Charcott, Penshurst and Chiddingstone area. Grandfather Horace Winter had married Rosa Styles, daughter of the publican at the Greyhound. Rosa had died when their son Ted was 9 years old. Ted Winter married Evelyn Weller and Rosa was born in 1943. Horace was a hedge-layer who worked around the district. His claim to fame was warning the authorities that Ensfield bridge had developed a fault, a crack, that could have led to its collapse with fatal consequences. Rosa and her sister Mary and their parents slept in the front bedroom at 4 Green Cottages. Her grandfather slept in the back bedroom. Her parents repeatedly applied for a council house but were never successful. Grandad lived at No 4 until he died. He paid a low rent and after his death the cottage was sold as were many others as they became empty.

The Winters were a large family: thirteen children. An uncle, Fred, had been blinded in WW1. An occasional visitor to Charcott, he could navigate his way over from the railway station having travelled up from Brighton where he worked at St Dunstan's College teaching people how to read braille. He was an

ace domino player. Though he could 'feel' the value of dominos, he had to have cards imprinted with braille.

The Hills were their landlords and there would be periodic complaints about for instance the state of the path outside or of the building and proposals for increased rent, but generally the relationship was very amicable. Rent would be paid monthly at the office on the left past Camp Hill on the way to the Causeway. The farm was a focus for many childhood activities organised by Moira Hills, Patrick's mother. She played the violin for country dancing down at the Causeway and in the winter organised games of 'pick-a-stick' in front of the fireplace and in the summer held quizzes with prizes. Rosa remembers the Hills family being 'ever so good' to Charcott people.

The cottages by Charcott green had gardens to the rear where vegetables were grown. The occupants of the cottages co-operated in the gardening work, except for the Graylands who, as bakers, had to keep their hands clean and allowed the others to use their land.

Rosa's father worked on the railways which had advantages for the family. They each had three free tickets a year and used to travel to Hastings, Brighton and Folkestone. Friendly ticket inspectors and guards used not to clip the tickets so they could be used on multiple occasions.

Just over from their cottage was the forge and beyond that a field where from time to time a Mr Summers kept pigs. He was known as a 'bodgy' farmer. Rosa is not sure why but it sounds as if he 'did a bit here and a bit there'. Anyway, the important point was that he paid sixpence for a bag of acorns for his pigs. When the pigs were absent the field became a playground and a place to light bonfires. On Bonfire Night everyone would get together for soup, sausage rolls and toffee apples.

Hours could be whiled away playing hopscotch outside the telephone box. No-one had their own phone, so calls-in were fielded by the children who rushed along to fetch whoever the call was for. They were rewarded with sweets. Stoolball would be played in the summer. And then there was the harvesting of hops at Browning's farm over the fields. A different sort of harvest was provided in the orchard at Camp Hill. Scrumping was traditional but not approved by Steve Stevens the local bobby. Being caught once resulted in an

enquiry as to 'what you kids up to?'. Being caught a second time led to an awkward visit to parents.

**Roy Grant** was born in in Charcott 1927 next door to Mr Grayland's bakery and opposite Mr Skinner, the blacksmith. His father, Fred, worked at various times for Mr Cardon who made chestnut paling fences and as a gardener at Hall Place. Roy initially went to the school at Chiddingstone Causeway and remembers walking to school in the winter along frozen ditches 'which sometimes gave way, filling our gumboots'. 'Country life was always by the seasons. Winter also meant being allowed to skate on Hall Place lake which everyone loved'. The boys would also help Fred Grant with 'the game shooting of pheasants for the gentry for whom we boys would be stops. Cold frosty mornings, keeping the birds in the woods until the beaters came and drove the birds into the open where the guns were waiting. A well-earned half a crown, a ham sandwich and a bottle of lemonade, all for the gentry's fun'. Summer meant things like Scout Camp and at the end of summer there was fruit picking and hop picking. 'With the autumn came chestnuts. We roasted the sweet chestnuts for fun - we called them 'Spanish nuts' and the horse chestnuts were for conker games and for selling to the farmers for pig feed'.

**Tim Jeffrey** talks about pocket money always being scarce. To augment their income, Tim and Eric Elmsley used to scour the ditches round Charcott and even as far as Hildenborough, for 'empties', used beer bottles. They would scrape off the labels and bring them to the pub to get 3d for each bottle from Lloyd Delve the landlord. A usual haul would yield half-a-crown but a good day might earn 5 shillings.

In the 1970s, Tim bought his first car before he passed his test. In those days qualified drivers who were willing to go out with a learner were valued and Tim persuaded a Polish gentleman, who worked for the Council with his father, to take him out. There was a bargain: Tim would drive and his tutor would dictate the route which would take them from pub to pub round the district.

In the 1950 and '60s an annual treat was the British Legion trip to Margate. Three coaches would be hired for a 7.00 am start laden with food and crates of



beer. To add to the excitement, the wheels of the coaches would be chalk marked, round the rim, with numbers and bets were placed on the position when they got to their destination. Winners would receive a prize of about a pound, not a small amount of money in those days. Seating in the coaches was strictly allocated and great confusion often marked the end of the day when weary trippers had to remember or be gently reminded which coach to board.

**Angie Jenner**, Tim's sister, was born at home in Charcott in 1955. She lived with her father Reg, mother Ethel and brothers Tim and Rod. Angie married Richard a builder. Her mother and father had previously lodged in a bungalow on the green in Leigh before moving to Charcott in 1947. Angie's father was employed in forestry work by Lord Astor. In WW2 he had wanted to sign on but was stopped because forestry was a reserved occupation. After the war he became a maintenance worker on the railway before going on to work for the Sevenoaks Rural District Council.

Angie's infant and primary schooling took place in the Causeway school. Teachers included Mrs Motram, Mrs Jones and Miss Heighes. Angie, with Jane Taylor, was one of only two children who sat the 11plus in her year. They were put in a separate room and left alone. Angie remembers that they spent most of the time chatting and consequently their school careers continued in the September at Brionne Gardens (now Hillview), Tonbridge.

Childhood games included cricket on the main road past Charcott using an apple box for a wicket. Go carts were also constructed and she remembers her father racing down the hill from the church to the station in a bath chair. But life had its serious moments. Angie was given gold jewellery by a childhood admirer called Stephen. She took it home and showed it to her mother who was horrified and quickly found out that the little boy had 'borrowed' the loot from his grandmother.

Angie knew everyone in Charcott but also had extended family in many of the surrounding villages. This was a comfort but when engaged in less than respectable activities with her friends there was always someone who would recognise her. She would be sent off for the day with her friends carrying a pack of apple chutney sandwiches made by her mother. In the evening, they used to play a form of 'knock-down-ginger' on the front door of a particular

man at the Causeway who ran savings clubs for local people. They would run over the road and hide in the long grass on the cricket pitch and their victim would come after them with a big rubber torch hunting but never catching them. Another pastime was rat shooting with airguns at Wickhurst Farm.

Later in life, Angie became interested in history and archaeology and had excavated a one metre square hole, finding not much, except numbers of bones tied together. This caused some excitement until it was realised that the bones were probably the remnants of the paws of rabbits shot with a catapult by her father. The paws had been tied together and presented by her father as good luck charm.

**Jean Lucas** was born in Maidstone and lived in Broadstairs before marrying her husband Sid. They lived in a mouse-infested cottage at Compass Corner before moving in 1959 into one of the prefabs in Charcott with Christine aged 3 months. She had three more children, Janette, Amanda and James, while living in Charcott. James (always known as Jimmy) was born in the prefab. The last child, Amos, was born after they had left Charcott and moved to Barnett's Road in Leigh. Sid was a gardener who worked all the hours he could. On Sundays he would work in the morning and drop into the Greyhound for a pint before lunch and, just at the right time, their dog Lassie would break out of the garden and go to the pub to fetch him home. Jean remembers Charcott as a friendly place. Mr Grayland the baker took the trouble to invite her 'backstage' to see the bread-making process. Jean's children learned sign language so that they could communicate with the deaf child of one of their neighbours.

**Rowland 'Bonger' Pocock** was born 1943. He got his nickname because he played the part of 'Big Chief Bonger' in childhood games. His grandparents Charles and Maria lived at No 1 New Town, a two up/two down cottage owned by Hills. Charles worked at Lower Green Farm. Bonger's father Arthur was born in 1900, the eighth child. Only the last child, Robert, lived in Charcott throughout his life. Bongor's father Arthur was born in 1900, the eighth child. He went to school in Leigh and every morning, aged 6/7, drove five cows down to pasture in Leigh Park Farm and then drove them back in the evening. Arthur left to live in the Causeway on leaving school. His first job was as a boot boy at Redleaf House. He had a variety of jobs and worked for a time at the Powder Mills; he only left this because his mother worried about the dangers inherent

in the job. He eventually worked for Wisden, making cricket bats and lived in a house that went with the job, one of what were known as the 'factory' cottages on the Causeway.

**Mary Porch** started her school years in the Causeway. It was an enjoyable time. Mary particularly remembered dancing round the maypole on May Day. For a while at the start WW2 she went back to Somerset to live with her aunt, whom she remembers as a formidable lady. Then, having passed the 11 plus she went to Tonbridge Grammar School. However, after suffering at the hands of a bully she transferred to a convent school in East Street Tonbridge. After school she trained as a 'nanny' and worked as a matron in schools locally and as far away as Hertfordshire before finishing-up at the newly opened Hadlow College. Then in the 1950s, when her mother died, she came back to Charcott to look after her father and brother on the farm.

Like so many others, Mary described Charcott as 'friendly, small and somewhere where everybody knows everyone else'. As a child her life was happy; she wandered free across the fields. When she was young, the Bear and Burchett families lived, two families on a 'semi-detached' basis, in what is now Little Keepers (number 2 was then known as Margavon). Mr Burchett worked as a cricket ball maker at Wisden on the Causeway. As with most of the houses in Charcott, the Burchett's house was owned by the Hills family, headed by Captain Arthur Hills. At that time, through to after WW2, all houses in Charcott were tied to jobs on the estate or rented cottages. For instance, what is now Jessups was known as Orchard Cottage and this was split in two and in the 1940s was occupied by the Summers and Brown families. Henry Brown was a carter, working the cart horses and Mr Summers worked for Hills on the Redleaf estate (there was a later Mr Summers who owned Jessups).

Other notables included Eddie the last of the Gasson family. Eddie Gasson lived in the smaller half of Forge Cottage and walked each day to Hildenborough where he worked in a slaughterhouse. The Skinner family rented the larger part of Forge Cottage and Herbert ran the forge. Les Brooker was from New Town. He was apprenticed as an electrician after attending the Judd school in Tonbridge. His was a large family in a small house and in these circumstances children were often sent off to live elsewhere, generally with family. In this

case Miss Heighes the school teacher took him in and he stayed, living with her and looking after her until she died.

**Audrey Stroud**, was born in 1946 at 4 Railway Cottages on the Causeway. Her two sisters Wendy and Brenda had been born at the bakery in Charcott: the elder sister Brenda was born there as her parents were living with their parents; and Wendy was born there because her mother, Vi, was ill at the time and stayed with her mother. Vi Stroud was a Grayland, whose brothers were Norman, Stanley and Donald. Her father was Les Stroud who came from Wimbledon and worked on the railway. Les had suffered from glandular fever in his youth and a side effect was very bad claustrophobia so he could not travel from Wimbledon into London Bridge Station where he had been given a job in the audit office. Somehow this led to his working at Penshurst station.

The children suffered from the usual childhood illnesses but Audrey remembers her sister Wendy having whooping cough. When her mother asked the doctor whether she should be taken hop picking, he encouraged this 'as the fresh air would be good for her'.

### **Last Word**

Charcott today is not the Charcott of the pre-1950s. That can be said of so many of the hamlets around West Kent and, indeed, much of the rest of the UK. Until the 1950s most people had lived there because they worked in the manual or junior supervisory jobs available in the area. They moved in, some moved out and some came back. They had little mechanised support in the home or at work. Beyond the radio in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, their entertainment and social activities centred on Charcott.

Charting the reasons for Charcott's existence, including the importance of its position on major trackways, the development of the forge, the opening of the railway, a shop, the Greyhound, the bakery and the development local industry particularly at the Causeway, provides a framework within which the changes in employment and society more generally can be better understood.

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century we only have a statistical outline of what people were doing. For the following period, and particularly post-WW2 we have personal experience and memories of the tales told by predecessors.

It would be too much to claim that Charcott was an exciting place to live in, other than during WW2, and the working and living environment would have been tough though not at the time thought exploitative. However, it was a friendly place where people often worked together, played together, socialised, helped each other and where children ran free.

It was not until after WW2 that housing was sold, local authority housing was built and then sold-off, and living standards improved substantially. Subsequently, the ties that previously bound people together have loosened and Charcott's reason for existence has changed fundamentally.

Without its centuries-old crossroads position there would now be no Charcott. Without Avis Ingram it might be much smaller. It is hoped that this booklet will aid those curious souls who wonder 'why?', 'well, who lived there?' and 'what was life like for them?'

## **Sources and acknowledgements**

The Jutish Forest; KP Whitney

Leigh Historical Society (LHS) web site

Andrews Drury and Herbert map, 1769

The Turnpike Roads of Kent; James Carley

The Tonbridge Circular Walk; Deborah Cole

UK Censuses 1841-1911

Ordnance Survey

National Library of Scotland

Kent History and Library Centre

Tonbridge and Sevenoaks Libraries

Kent Archaeological Society

Extracts from the memoirs of Alf Anderson, Lucille Baker, and Roy Grant, information about the Hobbs, Winters and Styles families from Christine Litchfield, and Barry Gardner and Michael Robinson's history of the Penshurst airfield, are from LHS web site.

Barbara Bear and Daisy Batchelor's memoirs are from 'We had Everything', Chris Rowley, 2000.

Colin Burchett's memoirs are recorded on the Wartime Memories Project web site.

As well as from Rosa Gower, memories from Gillian Bamblett, Russ Brown, Tim Jeffrey, Angie Jenner, Jean Lucas, Rowland Pocock, the late Mary Porch and Audrey Stroud have been gratefully recorded.

In addition, help has been generously given by Brian Ball, Lizzie Bradbury, Ian and Meg Brown, Sarah and Edward Byrne, Rebecca Day, Heidi Freeman, Des Gower, Nick Grantham, Nick Hills, Rosie Jones, Ginny Morris, Sally Pocock, Caroline Tebrett and Kate Welshman. Expert assistance has been provided by Tonbridge friends Bruce Adam and David Lloyd and by James Cook, Joyce Field, Mark Hammer and Chris Rowley from the Leigh Historical Society.





