

February, 1941.

Vol. 2. No. 1.

# The Abinger Chronicle

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Price Sixpence.

## *The Abinger Chronicle*

appears frequently, as funds allow, monthly, if possible. While many of the contributors are local to the Abinger district, or frequent visitors to it, like Max Beerbohm, E. M. Forster, Desmond MacCarthy, R. C. Trevelyan and Ralph Vaughan Williams, many come from far afield.

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THE EDITOR

CHERRY COTTAGE

ABINGER COMMON,

DORKING, SURREY

The annual subscription is 6/- post free; 3/- for six months, post free. These should be sent to the Editor.

(Cheques, if used, should be made out to Sylvia Sprigge. No stamps, please).

NOTE—Vol. I., Nos. 1—12, is now out of print.



# *The Abinger Chronicle*

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*Vol. 2. No. 1.*

*February, 1940*

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## AUTUMN VIEW

Gulls, white gulls, like flakes of snow heaping  
Over the track of plough, over horse and man,  
Far though you are on the hill, hold the eye leaping  
Up, down, over, against the brown of earth.

Seen you have I as a drift, piled by the flakes of snow,  
Seen you as white leaves blowing, trying to print in mind  
Feathery gusts that cover—cover, hood over and follow—  
Man at his moving plough, man and his white-flecked track.

What must he feel as he works, drowned in your wings  
and crying,

Knowing you only as gulls fled from the autumn seas?

One, one, one—you, he, I, who am eyeing,

One in my heart where I stand, tasting the ache of the land.

GEOFFREY ELEY

## THE HORNS OF ELFLAND

On such days things happen—to the body, to the mind,  
or to the spirit. I was aware of it even as I rode out of  
the stable yard, and I felt sure that Robin the horse was  
aware of something. Even Toby, the gay, inconsequent  
little mongrel, of spaniel breed and setter shape, seemed,  
if possible, to be more hilariously joyful and expectant than  
usual.

As we went round the base of the Great Down, the  
salt wind from the west carried golden leaves, wisps of  
straw and an occasional small feather in its swirling course.  
The winter sun shone clear and the sky was wild—a day  
to rejoice in, and the first long ride since war began. We  
cantered down a cart-track coming out on one side of a

*The Horns of Elfland*

stark wind-emptied valley—not a sign of human life or habitation. Then suddenly from afar a gay shout travelled down the hillside.

“Bang! Bang! You’m dead you’m be, oi got ’ee vair, oi did! *Bang!* oi say, *Bang!*”

A very small boy far up the hill was playing his lonely game. I slumped in the saddle (it was too muddy to stage a fall), and with the best imitation I could muster of a wounded trooper I rode up the hill towards the solitary little figure. He stood clasping in one hand a vast empty basket, in the other an absurd toy gun.

“I am not *dead*, but you certainly got me, so I am your prisoner and wounded,” I said. “It was a fine shot; you spotted us very quickly.”

His grave, slightly anxious face lit up with a vivid smile.

“Aw, it ain’t a real gun; ’tis only a ’ooden gun fer pretend—Oi be th’ infantry, oi be, an’ us be marchin’, an’ this yere be drum.”

And he reversed his basket, gripped it between his knees, and beat a spirited tattoo.

“I wish we could stay and play too, and be your prisoners, but we must get on to Lulworth. Tell you what,” I said, having a sudden inspiration, “we will be your cavalry and ride on before. The rest of the regiment is over there.” I waved my left arm vaguely, remembering as I did so that legend told of a gay band of Cavalier horsemen engaging with a troop of Roundheads in this very valley. “You see, all the other horses are behind us over there?”

He looked up at the hillside for a still second; the slow, shy smile changing into a flaming excitement. Then, dropping his basket and his gun and clutching his two hands together, he shouted, “Oi do zee they! Un be like in pitcher-books, an’ like volk do tell yer abouts. Oi do zee, oi do!”

At that moment old Robin suddenly went tense under me, threw up his head, arched his neck, tossing his mane against the dazzling sky, and neighed a long, triumphant, challenging call.



*The Horns of Elfland*

"He do zee they too, hark to he! He be a-callin' they. Oh, do ee zee they pretty horses? Oh, look! oh, look!"

The child's voice trembled with delight and ended in a broken squeak of ecstasy, and Robin pawed the ground and snorted in his excitement. The spell-bound little face below held my gaze fascinated. He turned his eyes, ice-blue and brilliant, up to mine, and there I saw reflected as it were against the sky, the whole gay pageant of a troop of horse; rank on rank of tossing mane and shining spear of fluttering pennant and flashing blade, of glittering ornament and waving plume—and Robin neighed once again and arched his neck.

Dare I look round? Was there really that entrancing vision; and was it the ghost of that Cavalier troop—a phantom army? Did I not *feel* them? Did I not hear them? Or did I but imagine it—those gay horsemen and their prancing steeds? I turned—but it was not for me. The hillside was empty save for the stunted thorn trees.

"Come," I cried, "you are the commander-in-chief; give the word to advance; we are all ready."

Crimson with pride, the child drew himself up very straight. "Charge!" he shouted, and we were away at a mad gallop; even Toby, with ears flying, flattening his little body low to the ground in an effort to keep the pace.

Somewhere afar among the hills a bugle flung out its clear limpid note on the crisp air, and Robin answered with a long quavering neigh, a trifle anxious this time, a trifle questioning, and ending in a wistful nicker.

Now we were galloping out of the valley; the little commander-in-chief could be seen no longer; the empty hills threw back Robin's long call; faintly, as from very far away, the silver notes of the bugle sounded again. They (who ever "they" may have been) were gone; and we were over the hill, and the valley lay behind us also.

The sun shone pale and golden, burnishing the beech leaves and making the wide sea a sheet of polished metal. In the lanes there flickered the scarlet of bryony berries and holly. On all the downs sheep-bells chimed, and rooks and gulls called overhead. Rabbits scurried among

*The Horns of Elfland*

the gorse, and Toby chased them joyously; no other thought disturbed his cheerful soul. But all that day, no matter where we rode, by cliff or lane or down, through woods or by the sea, the spell of the valley was strong upon me. And all that day Robin carried himself proudly, with arched crest and high step, with tossing mane and flashing eye; and from time to time he called, his head thrown up, a long questioning wistful neigh; and at times he stopped and listened.

Listened for what, I wondered, and to what was it that he called? What had there really been in that empty valley? Could it have been a ghostly band of gay Cavaliers with armour shining, with gold lace glittering, with clank and clatter of stirrup and spur? Or, far better, was it perhaps some troop of fairy riders on elfin horses, some lovely spirits of the air with "horns of Elfland faintly blowing?"

"What was it, old man?" I asked, as I slipped his bridle off that evening in his warm, clean stable. He was no longer tense and proud, as one who trod enchanted paths. Relaxed and happy, he snuggled his nose against my pocket and looked at me with his kind, quiet eyes, and I listened to the rich sound of slow contented munching. Yet there was something deeper than contentment in the warm hay-scented air.

ELIZABETH MUNTZ

## FEBRUARY

Small buds are opening;  
It is Spring.  
O, my dear,  
Can you hear  
How the birds sing?



*February*

Then merrily take my hand,  
 A magic wand.  
 I will step with you  
 The woods through,  
 And show you fairyland.

These spikes of shining green !  
 A dainty queen,  
 A bluebell,  
 Is rising from a brown well,  
 And soon she will be seen.

Between those spotted leaves,  
 A lord with lady, weaves  
 A deadly plot  
 In their small grot,  
 They are a pair of thieves.

And here, as though in play,  
 An acorn rolled away  
 —Into the bank  
 It sank—  
 Now spears the moss to-day.

Two yellow buds that shine  
 Are celandine.  
 Hush ! We must creep,  
 They are asleep,  
 Watched by the young Woodbine.

V. S. WAINWRIGHT

## CAEDMON'S SONG

We of the Plough we love each seed,  
 the barren and the green,  
 and the brown lark with a dewey wing  
 in the stubble in between.

*Caedmon's Song*

We of the Plough we vow again :  
 This land shall be our own;  
 and we shall stand on our fair soil  
 as one who stands alone.

We of the Plough we turn and face  
 those mighty times and tides.  
 Whatever God ordaineth man  
 that shifts or else abides.

D. EARDLEY WILMOT

## PILOTS WAITING

On rough-marked court on muddy field  
 A game of quoits the pilots play;  
 And to their thoughts sweet respites yield  
 Unknowing then what brings the day.

Care-free gay laughter lights each brow  
 As youth's best gifts they thus bestow.  
 And are those days so distant now  
 When Drake played bowls on Plymouth hoe?

E. M. SKIPPER

These, Polly, are some of my childhood memories \*  
 which I have strung together for you:

## 6. GOING HOPPING

It was with joy that I heard the Aunts announce one morning at breakfast that we were going for a day's hop-picking. It was early in September, and the date was fixed for a week ahead "if the weather is suitable." This was an ominous phrase; so often I thought the weather suitable when the Aunts thought otherwise.

However, when the day arrived the weather was all it should be, and we made an early start. In those days

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[ \* With these two Childhood Memories, the series of Edenbridge recollections of 1869 is concluded.—Ed.]



*Childhood Memories*

little, if any, outside labour was employed. The whole village turned out, man, woman and child.

We were equipped with sun-bonnets and aprons to protect us from the dust. We found ourselves part of a throng all moving in the same direction. When we arrived at the hop garden many were already at work bending over the bins. The bins were made of canvas, trough-like in shape, and into these the hops were picked. It was a lively scene; men were moving about carrying the poles round which the hop vines were entwined; these they had pulled up bodily from the ground, and were now carrying to the pickers at the bins as required.

I did not notice any strangers except some gipsies encamped in one corner. They had no living-van, but had set up an arrangement of half-hoops covered with old woollen cloths to form a tent. The Aunts did not approve of them. They had safely locked and bolted the doors before leaving home, but the sight of the gipsies raised some misgivings in their minds and made them sadly uneasy about the safety of their belongings. "Were all the party in the hop garden?" (I seemed to read their thoughts), or "were there *others* making the most of their opportunity while the little town was emptied of its folk?" Though the Aunts did not like them, they pleased and excited me; they looked so strange and pretty with their gaudy 'kerchiefs so jauntily tied round their swarthy necks.

We found the bin which had been allotted to us and started work. It took a long time to fill the bin; when it was full the bright, beautiful, rustling hops were tightly packed into big baskets and carried away to be measured; and off we started again to re-fill our bin.

Towards the close of the afternoon great clouds began to gather; raindrops began to fall, and at last the rain came down in earnest. As we left I took a parting look at the hop garden—half of it was in ruins where the poles had been ruthlessly pulled up; leaves and hops were trodden into the now sodden ground; the remaining hop-vines were clinging dejectedly to their poles. There was one bright spot, and that was where the gipsies were encamped. They

*Childhood Memories*

had roused their fire to a glowing furnace, a pot was boiling over it, and they were all snug inside their tent—at home.

## 7. ALL "SOULS"

I suppose I was between ten and eleven years old when a great wave of religious emotionalism swept the country, and Edenbridge did not escape it. Not far from our home an immense marquee was set up on a waste piece of land, and this was filled nightly with anxious people wanting "to be saved."

I remember the smell of the oil lamps mixed with the musty scent of trodden grass; for, of course, I was there also wanting "to be saved." I can see myself sitting one night at the end of one of the unsteadily-placed wooden forms when a newly converted edged in beside me and solemnly asked, "Are you in the 'way'?" I hoped I wasn't, and politely moved up a little. I found I had mistaken her meaning when she began to ask searching questions about my "soul." Without knowing it she had raised a very thorny question, for I had puzzled long as a child on the problem as to where in my small body this could be placed. My mind, which did my lessons for me, I decided was in my brain; my heart, meaning my affectionate feelings, naturally dwelt in my heart (I, not knowing at that time what a bloody affair the heart is); and, most important of all, my soul, where did it live? Neither my brain nor my heart seemed the right place; with all my questioning neither my brain nor my heart could tell me. So now I went home, sorrowfully, deciding to put off my conversion to a more convenient season.

## ENVOY

It is against the background of the old Mill Wheel that the Aunts move in my recollections of them; and it is to the sound of its ceaseless throbbing on my spiritual ear that each picture revolves.

If I have made any of these live again for you, dear Polly, I am content.

SARAH SHOREY GILL



## PROPAGANDA

This thought  
 I think I think  
 Is not my thought,  
*It is* But the thought  
 Of one *who thought I ought*  
~~Who thought I ought~~  
 To think his thought.

IDA PROCTER

## OPPORTUNITY

I met opportunity yesterday.  
 But I was talking with fiery indignation  
 About unwarrantable official interference with individual  
     liberty  
 And I never saw it.  
 I saw its shadow from beyond;  
 I could have recalled it,  
 But I had not the presence of mind  
 And it vanished for ever.

The spring tide swayed at the flood, full and quiet,  
 But my boat was not ready;  
 The black horse Time trotted by, forelock streaming,  
 But my hands were full of parcels;  
 Freedom, a falcon's shadow, crossed my window to beckon,  
 But I was busy typing.

The tide is ebbing, the black horse galloping, the falcon  
     winging away.

E. D. YOUNG



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