

Hurtwood Gypsies, Cranleigh Women's Institute, 1949

Gypsies

For many years the Hurtwood was inhabited by a colony of gypsies who lived in a camp beside Wickets Well.

Sometime about 1924 a school was started for them near the camp by Lord Custace Percy and a group of his friends. He was then Minister of Education and resident in Albury.

The schoolmaster, Mr. Hillier, at first lived with his family in a caravan near the camp, but his children, being accustomed to separate bedrooms and darkness stayed awake till all hours, and so the family moved to rooms in Shamley Green. Besides reading, writing and counting, the children were taught handicrafts.

The school, which was the first of its kind in the country, was an unqualified success as it raised the children enough to enable them to attend elementary schools later on. That and the Act of Parliament passed in the early '30s forbidding the lighting of fires on commons and also forbidding caravans or squatters to stay more than two nights on commons struck at the roots of vagabonds who were at that time a running sore for the nation at large. Mr. Dray, in the kindness of his heart allowed a maximum of 100 to stay in what became known as "the camp". He issued a licence to each head of a family, which allowed them to stay contingent on good behaviour, proper disposal of refuse etc. The gypsies did still cost the nation a good deal, as though they earned good money - both men and women working in the fields - they paid neither rent nor rates & taxes. They bought no clothes but begged them and when their children had any illnesses this necessitated their removal to the Poor Law Hospital as the mothers were too ignorant to nurse them, and the tents too damp and insanitary, whereas the villagers who had less money to spend, could and did nurse their own sick.

The gypsies spent their money on drink and there were subsequent fights - so much so that the Windmill Inn was forbidden to serve them, as it was the practice of the men to encourage the women to fight each other outside, and this

resulted in overcrowded cases at the local courts in the following weeks. It should also be recorded that, shade work in civilising the gypsies was done by Mr Stone from Cranleigh Village - a wonderful man - he and his friends came up on Sunday afternoons for years, leaving their comfortable firesides to come up the hill and stand about in all weathers to teach the children who were so timid and wild that even sweets and oranges would often not tempt them out of their tents. This timidity was caused by the fact that they were detested alike by cottagers and landlords - the latter disliked them because they were, naturally enough, expert poachers, and when they - the gypsies - became too thick upon the ground and the pheasants too few, the landowners clubbed together and had a drive by the police, who beat down the squalid dwelling shacks and drove the gypsies out - of course they filtered back again by degrees.

The only contact with the gypsies prior to Mr Stone's work and the gypsy school was the police, but they have been so reformed by Christian teaching and educated in cleanliness, that they now really are citizens and no longer afraid of the police.

One of Mr Stone's great pieces of work was a tea each summer, up on the forest, to which he persuaded not only the Cranleigh villagers to send cakes, but to come themselves and to bring their children - so that gypsy children and village children ran races together - no mean achievement. It must have needed repeated effort.

Various Contributors



The Last View of the Windmill Inn before the fire of Nov 7 1906



The original Windmill Inn, Pitch Hill, after the 1906 fire

10th Hayward and Crosby died.

The Hurwood Gipsies

50 years ago

9 Feb. 1946

ABOUT 60 gipsies gathered in the new school at Hurwood, 50 years ago, for an occasion which was probably the first of its kind in the country. It was to be an evening class, but mothers carrying sleeping babes, children, fathers and old men and women turned up. The event quickly became one of song, dance and comradeship, with the participants swaying rhythmically to familiar tunes.

A swarthy young woman started things off by standing up and softly singing traditional love songs and ballads, in which she would croon a verse and be followed with a chorus response from the rest. Gipsies soon began to do their own thing in the centre space ringed by relatives and friends. One man stepped in to de-

monstrate clog dancing, and was joined by others to the accompaniment of hand-clapping watchers.

Another, a burly six-footer also hesitantly began to sing obviously well-known ditties, and gaining confidence, went on for half an hour without faltering in repertoire until an aged man from behind the watchers began with equally familiar tunes on his accordion.

Hurwood Gipsy School was but recently opened, and London papers prophesied quick closure. The schoolmaster stoutly disputed this, pointing out to people at the gathering that he offered a penny for every word his pupils managed to spell on the blackboard, and that week he had quite a few who earned themselves 7d.



THE WINDMILL INN, PITCH HILL, SURREY.

Gypsies - *the handwritten text above:*

For many years the Hurtwood was inhabited by a colony of gypsies who lived in a camp beside Wickets Well.

Sometime about 1924 a school was started for them near the camp by Lord Eustace Percy and a group of his friends. He was then Minister of Education and resident in Albury.

The schoolmaster, Mr Milner, at first lived with his family in a caravan near the camp, but his children, being accustomed to separate bedrooms and darkness, stayed awake till all hours, and so the family moved to rooms in Shamley Green. Beside reading, writing and counting, the children were taught handicraft.

The school, which was the first of its kind in the country, was an unqualified success as it raised the children enough to enable them to enter elementary schools later on. That and the Act of Parliament passed in the early '20s forbidding the lighting of fires on commons and also forbidding caravans and squatters to stay more than two nights on commons struck at the roots of vagabonds who were at that time a running sore for the nation at large. Mr Bray in the kindness of his heart allowed a maximum of 100 to stay in what became known as "the camp". He issued a 5/- [*5 shillings*] licence to each head of a family, which allowed them to stay contingent on good behaviour, proper disposal of rubbish, etc. The gypsies did still cost the nation a good deal, as though they earned good money - both men and women working in the fields - they paid neither rent, nor rates & taxes. They bought no clothes but begged them and when their children had any illnesses this necessitated their removal to the Poor Law Hospital as the mothers were too ignorant to nurse them, and the tents too damp and insanitary, whereas the villagers who had less money to spend, could and did nurse their own sick.

The gypsies spent their money on drink and there were subsequent fights - so much so that the Windmill Inn was forbidden to serve them, as it was the practice of the men to encourage the women to fight each other outside, and this resulted in overcrowded cases in the local courts in the following week. It should also be recorded that spade work in civilising the gypsies was done by cllr Stone from Cranleigh Village - a wonderful man - he and his friends came up on Sunday afternoons for years, leaving their comfortable firesides to come up the hill and stand about in all weathers to teach the children who were so timid and wild that even sweets and oranges would often not tempt them out of their tents. This timidity was caused by the fact that they were detested alike by cottagers and landlord - the latter disliked them because they were, naturally enough, expert poachers, and when they - the gypsies - became too thick upon the ground and the pheasants too few, the landowners clubbed together and had a drive by the police, who beat down the squalid dwelling shacks and drove the gypsies out - of course they filtered back again by degrees.

The only contact with the gypsies prior to cllr Stone's work and the gypsy school was the police, but they have been so reformed by Christian teaching and educated in cleanliness, that they now really are citizens and no longer afraid of the police.

One of cllr Stone's great pieces of work was a tea each summer, up on the forest, to which he persuaded not only the Ewhurst villagers to send cakes, but to come themselves and to bring their children so that gypsy children and village children ran races together - no mean achievement. It must have needed repeated effort.