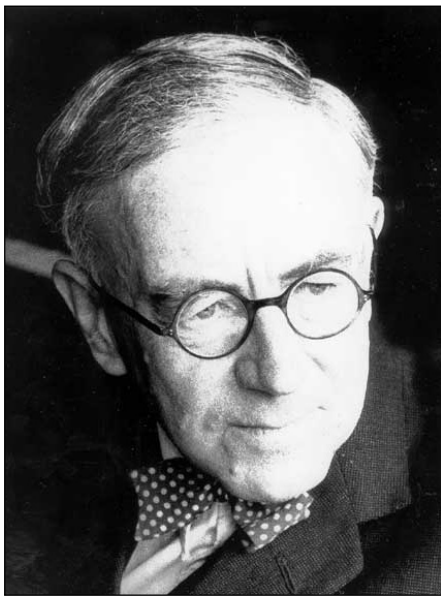




# The Secret History of Chelsfield



Publicly humiliated local historian, **Dave Griffiths** reveals some more highly questionable facts about Chelsfield's past

*Above A J P Taylor, the famous historian whose attention to detail and fastidious research has had no influence whatsoever over the author*

**D**espite the almost universal criticism of my *History of Chelsfield in the 2008 Programme*, I have insisted on sharing some more of my historical findings with you all. Researching local history is fascinating I have been told and it is of great sadness to me that I am unable to enjoy such pursuits, thanks to an ongoing daily commitment in the saloon bar of the Five Bells.

This year we begin with the time when Chelsfield man progressed from walking on all-fours

to standing upright, an athletic feat still challenging to some local people leaving the Five Bells on a Friday evening.

## The Birth of Man

**Little is known of Chelsfield in the prehistoric age.** The fact that it is some 600 feet above modern sea level would tend to imply that the land it stands on was above the oceans back in the Jurassic era but we have to turn to archaeology to discover more about the area's pre-history.

Chelsfield is fortunate in having as one of its residents none other than Professor Bruce Socks, Senior Lecturer in Metal Detecting and Mudlarking at UCH (University of Cannock House). Professor Socks has spent the past few years using the latest technology to screen large areas of the village in order to unearth artefacts indicating the existence of pre-historic settlements and drinking cider. A demonstration of the sensitivity of this equipment came after last year's Fair when the Professor was continuing his survey in what had been the exhibitors' car park. As he swept the area, he began to detect faint traces of metal and, after painstaking examination, managed to discover the location of a complete Ford Fiesta which had been left in the car park by a local resident too drunk to remember where they had parked it.

During his studies Professor Socks was concerned that he was getting spurious Geophysical data which he strongly suspected could have been caused by Broadband cabling within the village. British Telecom assured him that this was extremely unlikely as all Chelsfield's broadband cabling was in fact made from damp string, capable of speeds of just under half that of a bicycle.

Stories of the existence of a different genetic strain of human known as Chelsfield Man have abounded for years. Prof. Socks has been keen to discover remains of this creature which would prove conclusively if another chain in the missing link could be traced to Chelsfield. Early in 2008, unidentified bones began appearing in a field near the village pond on Warren Road. Socks investigated and over the next ten months, excavated a near complete skeleton, attracting international interest, from all over the world, as international interest tends to be. Painstakingly reassembling the fragile skeleton, certain features began to emerge.

Chelsfield Man was a great deal shorter than modern Homo Sapiens, and far from being a biped, he manoeuvred using four crude wheels, one of which, on our specimen at least, appeared to be stuck at a strange angle. Certainly our example of Chelsfield Man would have had difficulty in propelling himself in

the direction he intended to go. He also had many more ribs than modern man and a huge upturned chest cavity.

A month or two after the main discovery, Professor Socks unearthed a further and critical piece of Chelsfield Man: a red bone (or indeed early plastic) handle into which were carved ancient runes which Socks managed to translate into the mysterious word 'Tesco'. His archaeological colleagues may have lost interest in Chelsfield Man but Socks is convinced that 'Tesco' must relate to some kind of primitive form of worship. Now slightly obsessive about his claims, he has become even more marginalised by the scientific community and last year began making wild predictions about the imminent construction of a 'vast Cathedral to the god Tesco'. Socks even claims to have visited this 'cathedral' and has been heard to mention 'Special Offa' who one can only presume was an ancestor of Offa, King of Mercia from 757 to 796, a man who could not resist a nice Dyke.

## The Norman Conquest

**After his defeat of King Harold II in 1066, Duke William of Normandy, later to be known as William the Conqueror took his huge army of 8,400 men and moved north toward London.** His route from the bloody battlefield outside Hastings (via Robertsbridge, Etchingam, Stonegate, Wadhurst and Frant where they had to continue on foot thanks to

weekend engineering works) took him straight into Chelsfield village where he and his troops rested.

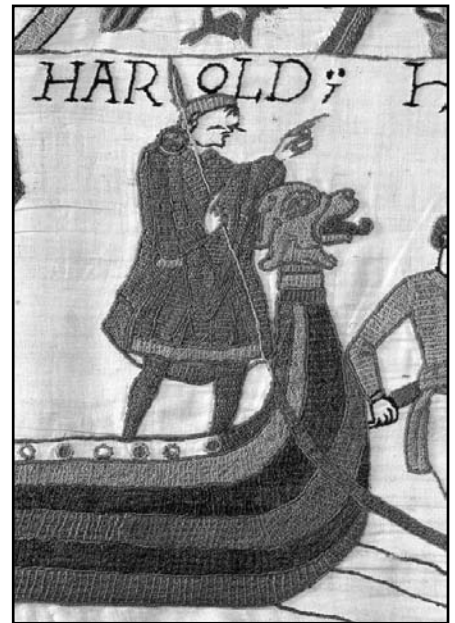
The local tavern, *The No Church*, was ill-prepared for such a large lunch party and the landlord, Douglas-of-Parkes allegedly told them all to 'go away\*' and pointed out, incorrectly as it happens, that there was 'plenty of room up the graveyard for them'. Chelsfield had no official burial site at that time as the local Church of St Martin-of-Tours would not be built for another 100 years, around the same time that anyone ordering sandwiches that day could expect to receive their meal.

William left the Chelsfield and continued north, taking what is now the route of the A224, Court Road. This was a blow for the traders in Orpington high street who had rather hoped he would visit the French market in the Walnuts.

Further generations of the Parkes family renamed the tavern in the 12th Century, when it became *The No Bells*, reflecting the arrival of the newly built St Martin-of-Tours but noting its silent nature. In 1761, the pub became *The Five Bells* to reflect the installation of said number of bells in the church tower but from then on, the bell ringers' annoying habit of cramming as many bells as possible into the church tower has been ignored by the pub.

As secularism continues to replace traditional faith in the UK,

*\*this is an approximate modern English translation of a colloquial Anglo-Saxon term*



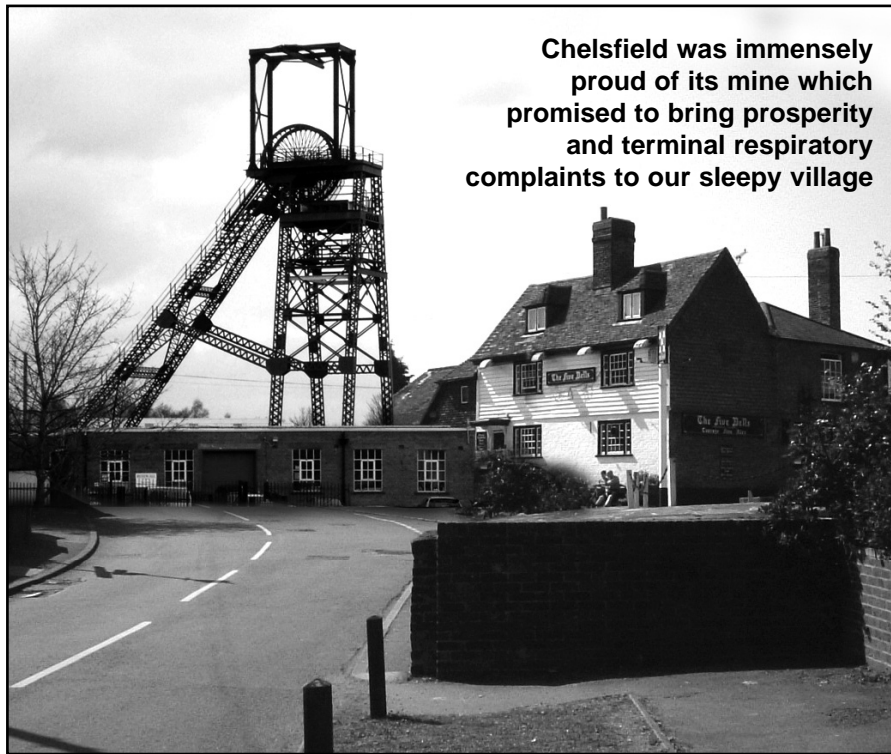
**A panel from the Bayeux Tapestry. It is thought that the reference to 'HAROLD' indicates that this depicts a very early episode of *Steptoe & Son* From the author's collection of illegal internet downloads**

it is likely that by around 2015, the church will be demolished and the land sold off. If this indeed happens, the pub may well be renamed the *Chelsfield Park Social Housing Initiative Arms*. The bell ringers will of course be re-trained to help them integrate back into society.

Court Road was built in the 1920s and whilst aficionados of the Norman Conquest appreciate the historical significance of its routing, most local people stick with the more traditional (and colourful) explanation: local landowners paid bribes to the Bromley Council to avoid the road going through their land.

## Coal – the new gold!

**Coal mining was for a short while, one of the dominant industries in Chelsfield.** The demand for coal in the newly



been embraced by the farming community and similar structures can be seen throughout the countryside, normally used to cultivate young plants.

Sadly there are only three tunnels left in Chelsfield but fortunately local campaigners are keen to see them restored to their former glory as a memorial to Sir Arthur and his business partner, Sir Lancelot Car-Wash-and-Valeting-Service. Both gentlemen received their knighthoods in recognition of their services in providing people with too much time on their hands something to moan about.

## The Winter of Discontent

**Bringing us nearly up to date, those of a certain age will remember well the austerity of the winter of 1974 when the striking coal miners brought the country to its knees.**

Edward Heath's government was forced to adopt the unprecedented measure of the three day week in order to reduce the use of electricity by industry. In Chelsfield, where newspaper deliveries were much as they are today and television and radio reception was extremely patchy, news of the adoption of three day week was noted in principle although some of the detail seems to have been misinterpreted.

Consequently the then Mayor of Chelsfield, Alderman Crosby (Junior), instructed all villagers that each week would consist of three days plus a weekend, thereby reducing the length of the

industrialised Britain of the nineteenth century was immense and mine owners were making huge profits from bringing the mineral to the surface. Chelsfield's mine, located south of the Village promised much when it was opened by an ebullient Alderman Crosby in 1910.

As a mining district, Chelsfield was perfect: plenty of local labour and close to major trade routes. In fact it was only the total lack of coal which counted against the village.

It could even be said that the Chelsfield Mining Corporation (CMCo) were unwise to build a mine somewhere with no coal but records show that they were no fools. Well aware that they were extremely unlikely to find any coal, CMCo went against all mining traditions by avoiding the unnecessary cost of drilling any holes in the ground. This saving allowed the mine to remain a going concern for far longer than one might have expected and it

was eventually closed on 14th January 1910 three days after it opened. This of course was a huge disappointment to the local men of Chelsfield who were forced to find other ways of dying young.

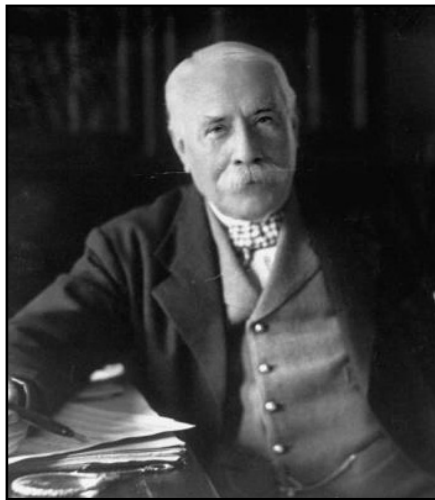
## Inventions and Inventors

**In my previous historical papers I mentioned local inventor Josiah Sparkes and his ill-fated muck-whisk.** Sparkes was however not the only inventor to emerge from Chelsfield Village. It is largely forgotten that the modern agricultural structure known as the 'poly-tunnel' was invented in Chelsfield by local entrepreneur, Sir Arthur Polytunnel. No one is really sure why he called them poly-tunnels.

Originally intended as an enclosure to regulate atmospheric temperature for exotic fish breeders, this innovative steel and polythene structure has now

week by two days. Residents of Chelsfield were delighted that they only had to wait three days for the next weekend and this go-faster calendar continued unnoticed until the Chelsfield 'New Millennium' celebrations which took place on the eve of 27th July 1992, slightly earlier than in the rest of the world. It was only in the early hours of Chelsfield's 21st century that local people realised that theirs was the only firework display in the whole of London and the penny began to drop.

Repercussions were far-reaching and complicated. Chelsfield's claim to have the world's oldest vicar was now bought into doubt when it emerged that Canon Leslie King was not in fact 140 years old but a mere 133. Guinness Book of Record guru Norris McWhirter personally visited Chelsfield to strip Canon King of his title and was greeted by the unedifying sight of a number of families in St



Martin's churchyard exhuming bodies of relatives who had mistakenly died of old age a few years too soon. He pointed out that as Canon King had been dead for many years, his claim on the record was tenuous to say the least.

As the real new millennium approached, wildly exaggerated predictions of the effect of the millennium bug dominated press headlines. According to 'experts', hospitals would shut down, airliners would fall out of the sky, televisions would only be able to show 24 hour re-runs of 'On The

Sir Arthur Polytunnel was often mistaken for the English composer Edward Elgar. In fact it is believed that the first performance of *Dream of Gerontius* was conducted by Sir Arthur when he inadvertently wandered into the Albert Hall on his way home from filing the patent for the poly-tunnel coincidentally

Buses', electricity would reverse causing light bulbs to absorb rather than emit light, and some other more far-fetched claims.

Older residents of Chelsfield smiled ruefully; if the whole world had adopted the 'Chelsfield Week' as it had become known, the millennium bug would have arrived before most people owned a personal computer and certainly before everyone realised that 'On The Buses' was in fact rubbish.

**See you next year for more of my historical musings...**

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