

About Ewhurst

(Extracted from Highways and Byways in Surrey T. Parker 1900)



CHAPTER XV

CRANLEIGH AND EWHURST

A coffee-pot yew—Vachery Pond—The osprey as a guest—Baynards and its ghost—Ewhurst—A pet lamb—Children and a gipsy—Bilberries on Pitch Hill—Lost in Hurst Wood—Farley Heath—Mr. Watson's poem—Blackheath well named.

CRANLEIGH LIES ON THE EDGE OF THE FOLD COUNTRY, neither in it nor of it. In the Fold country the villages are set deep in woodlands and grass fields, and the railway runs too far away to bring the slate for the villas. But the railway runs through Cranleigh and stops there, and so does the builder. The fields and woods are being "developed." But in the heart of the village there is a touch of what is old and quiet. A strange, towering figure of a clipped yew stands up in the middle of a small garden, whether most like a peacock on a pillar, or a colossal coffee-pot, I cannot determine. A wheelwright's yard is near by—one of the best of all sights of any country village. Farm carts and their wheels, and big spokes and shavings of white wood give as full a notion of solid, strong outdoor work as the forge and the rick yard, and no village is quite a country village without the three.

Two manors, Vachery and Knowle, have chapels in the church, which is cruciform; but the Vachery chapel is seated for ordinary churchgoers. The Knowle chapel is separated off by a fine fifteenth-century screen. But the chief beauty of Cranleigh Church is the great sense of breadth and light which you get from the size of the nave and the chancel arch. The broad spaces and the massive Norman pillars set an air of strength and quiet in the place that belongs alone to noble churches.

Of Vachery Manor one may hear little; of Vachery Pond every trout fisher knows something. The maps mark a superb sheet of water, nearly a mile long, and, two or three times, travelling from Guildford or Horsham, I have tried to catch a glimpse of the water from the railway, but in vain. When at last I stood on the edge of the water, the reason was clear enough; the pond is surrounded by banks covered with trees. A right of way runs from the road near Cranleigh round the south of the pond to Baynards beyond, and the pond lies near the right of way, a grass-edged road alive with rabbits. I saw the pond first on a July morning; the drying leaves showed that earlier in the year the road to it ran between carpets of primroses.

The water lay without a ripple in the sun; at the far side, two crested grebes swam low, like submarines, diving for fish to feed their young, who asked for food without weariness and without ceasing, and received it with excited splashings. Under the bank danced a cotillon of tiny dragon-flies, needles of turquoise stuck suddenly on a reed, flitting aimlessly over the clear, shadowed water. Just in such sunlight, though later in the year, those two glorious guests visited Vachery Pond in September, 1904. A pair of ospreys, on their journey south for the winter, made the water their home for a few days, to the consternation of the wildfowl and the delight of the other trout fishers. One of them, writing to the Field at the time, described the way in which the bird he saw fished the water. It would sail up and down over the lake and then drop into the water with a resounding crash, rising always with a trout in its talons. But the visit did not last long. A keeper shot the male bird, and its mate—ospreys pair for life—went on to the south alone.

On the other side of Vachery Pond is Baynards, one of the historic Surrey houses, and a fine relic of Tudor days. Baynards once was the home of Margaret Roper, daughter of Sir Thomas More, and the story goes that after her father's execution she brought his head to Baynards. Perhaps that started the Baynards' ghost. Legend plays with the aura of Baynards as of Loseley. Once a year the two ghosts meet: the Baynards ghost dines at Loseley, and the Loseley ghost pays back the visit next year at Baynards.

At Ewhurst



North-east of Baynards an old Roman road runs from Rowhook on the Stane Street in Sussex towards Farley Heath, where there was a Roman camp. The Roman road, now hardly traceable, cuts the road from Cranleigh near Ewhurst. Ewhurst lives comfortably fifty years behind Cranleigh, and is still, happily, what the late Louis Jennings called it in *Field Paths and Green Lanes*, "a one-horse place." When Mr. Jennings was at Ewhurst everybody was half-asleep.

"At the post-office a woman and a girl turned out in some consternation to look at me, thinking, perhaps, that I had a letter concealed about me, and was about to post it, and thus overwhelm them with work." Such a village would be desirable anywhere. But Ewhurst, although it can be sleepy in the sunshine, as everything in the country ought to be, has an eye for country business. At the door of the post-office, when I was there on a hot day in July, a long-tailed sheep, fat and

woolly, cropped the grass. It was a pet lamb grown up, apparently, and pleased to be patted. A cart drove up, and there was a conversation which might have come out of Edgeworth's *Parent's Assistant* when Simple Susan's pet lamb was in the same evil case. From the cart descended a butcher, who shook his head when questioned by the lamb's caretaker, or keeper, who looked after its owner's interests from a neighbouring dwelling. Wasn't he worth three pounds? Not three pounds; no. Fifty-five shillings, perhaps, would be a fair price in a week's time. A fair price in a week's time—it was impossible to listen to the careful bargaining over the creature feeding in the sun. I went into the shop to buy something, and within a few minutes was asked, as an obvious admirer of the lamb, whether I would like him for fifty shillings.

Miss Edgeworth should have stayed at Ewhurst, and have seen the best of an English village as I did that July afternoon. Opposite the church—a church which, with its stainless glass windows, its white walls, and its green carpet and curtains, gives you the feeling of entering a drawing-room—are the village schools. Out of the schools as I watched them the village children came tumbling. Half of them made for a passage by the churchyard, where a small boy, gipsy or pedlar's child, sat in the shadow of the wall. He was dusty and hot, and by him lay a large bundle wrapped in a spotted blue handkerchief. One of the schoolchildren stopped after passing him, and whispered to another. Then four little boys went back and each dropped a penny or a halfpenny into the child's hand. Then they ran off through the churchyard.

The Ordnance Maps mark a hill north of Ewhurst of which the country children have never heard. Coneyhurst Hill, the map assures you, is 844 feet high, only 50 feet less than Hindhead. People who like bell-heather, bilberries, and a magnificent view should climb it, but it is no use asking the children the way to Coneyhurst Hill. Pitch Hill they know, and only Pitch Hill. Nor will they recognise bilberries or whortleberries so called; "hurts" is the name. Another point on which the traveller wandering in these wilds should assure himself is that he has plenty of time, or has a compass with him, or can find his way by the sun. The woods—Hurt Wood is the general name for miles—north and west of Pitch Hill are the loneliest places. Here and there a forest fire has

cleared openings in the trees, but where the pines have fallen or have been cut the bracken still grows breast high, and birches have seeded themselves into thick, thwarting plantations. The wood runs in ridges, so that whichever way you want to go you cannot keep an objective in sight. Missel thrushes clatter up from the open spaces; jays bark in the birches, angry at an intrusion. Except for them the silence, in a silent month like July or August, is profound.

When I was in Hurt Wood I wanted to walk from the windmill to Farley Heath, two and a-half miles as the crow flies, nearer five miles as I walked it. The perplexing thing is the number of disused rides and paths in the wood. They cross each other perpetually at right angles, like lines on a chessboard, and if you are walking diagonally across them the temptation is to a succession of knights' moves which end in wrong places. I followed one of these rides a long way, and the wood grew thicker and thicker; suddenly it ended, and I found myself in a clearing, with the loneliest little cottage in the corner, guarded by a huge black retriever in an iron kennel; a woman was drawing water by the door. Where was I, could she tell me? Where did I want to go to? she asked in reply—probably the right answer.

Farley Heath is one of the few well-defined stations of a Roman camp in the county. Mr. William Watson, writing in the shade of the Emperor Yew by Newlands Corner, thought of the Roman legionaries encamped on Farley Heath below the downs, and one of the finest passages in the poem he made there belongs half to the yew and half to Farley:—

**Nay, hid by thee from Summer's gaze
That seeks in vain this couch of loam,
I should behold, without amaze,
Camped on yon down the hosts of Rome,
Nor start though English woodlands heard
The selfsame mandatory word**

**As by the Cataracts of the Nile
Marshalled the legions long ago,
Or where the lakes are one blue smile
'Neath pageants of Helvetian snow,
Or 'mid the Syrian sands that lie
Sick of the day's great tearless eye,**

**Or on barbaric plains afar,
Where, under Asia's fevering ray,
The long lines of imperial war
O'er Tigris passed, and with dismay
In fanged and iron deserts found
Embattled Persia closing round,**

**And 'mid their eagles watched on high
The vultures gathering for a feast,
Till, from the quivers of the sky,
The gorgeous star-flight of the East
Flamed, and the bow of darkness bent
O'er Julian dying in his tent.**

Between Farley Heath and Chilworth Station, which is the chosen end of the walk from Cranleigh, is Blackheath, well named. In winter the flowerless heather darkens the whole moorland; and through it the roads, the rough roads the Roman legionaries knew well, run ribands of white sand.

