



So, did this really happen, or is it just a folk tale? A quick search on the internet does bring up several examples and You-tube videos of such fights. In Australia the toxic cane toads are apparently being eaten by wolf spiders and Australian tarantulas, as shown left. So perhaps the spiders in Marden were bigger in the 17th century!

However it seems that Elias Rolfe may not be an entirely reliable witness, as he was found guilty of “aggravated larceny and highway robbery” in Lamberhurst in 1678 and sentenced to death.

Thanks to Ray Morris, our local bird-ringer who came across the Marden reference in a recently published biography of “The Remarkable Mr Willughby” by Tim Birkhead. *Steve McArragher*

MARDEN SOCIETY PROGRAMME FOR 2019

Here are the details of our programme for 2019, as arranged so far. We have a couple of ideas for a summer outing, but would welcome any further suggestions.

Wed 23 rd Jan	AGM and Social	
Wed 27 th Feb	English Sparkling Wine <i>The history and future of “English Fizz”</i>	Nick Hall
Wed 27 th March	My Adventures in the land of Blue Sky	Cliff Grieve
Wed 24 th April	A Schoolgirls War <i>An account of the lives of Maidstone Grammar School girls during World War 2</i>	Mary Smith
Wed 22 nd May	History of the Red Arrows	Guy Bartlett
Wed 26 th June	Summer outing - TBD	
Wed 25 th Sept	Van 132, Soldier Sailor Spy Railway van 132 brought home the bodies of The Unknown Soldier, Edith Cavell from WW1.	Geoff Turner
Wed 23 rd Oct	History of Canals	Chris Woodward
Wed 27 th Nov	TBD	

ALAS THE OLD CRICKET FIELD IS NO MORE....

Yes, the diggers have moved in and started on the last of the major developments in Marden. Your Chairman and Secretary now have the noise of machinery and builders from both front and rear! It is in many ways sad to see what used to be beautiful green turf being ripped up, and the recently resurfaced tennis courts too. But the good news is that the new cricket pitch is up and running and apparently very successful. One thing missing however is the footpath that was promised to connect the new sportsground to the village. This should have run along the north side of the railway, but Railtrack have been unwilling to allow access to this bit of land. We understand from the Club Chairman that other options are being pursued, but there is nothing definite yet, watch this space.

The Parish Pump

THE JOURNAL OF THE MARDEN SOCIETY – SEPTEMBER 2018

Now the summer is nearly over so it is time for our Autumn Programme. Our first autumn talk is on **26th September when Melanie Gibson-Barton** will tell us about “**The Life and Times of Edith Cavell**”. This talk tells the story of the British nurse who died in Brussels in 1915, illustrated by photographs of existing artefacts from her life.

Then on **24th October** there will be a “**Talk and Demonstration of Handbells**” by **Mary Douglas of the Boxley Handbell Ringers**. Finally, on **28th November** Simon Ginnaw will tell us about “**The History of Mote Park**”. Simon is a wildlife expert who gave us a superb talk about the birdlife of Mote Park in March 2015.

All meetings will be in the **Vestry Hall at 7.30**, with refreshments and raffle as usual. We have almost finalised our 2019 programme, and details are given on the back page.

“OF SHREDS AND PATCHES”

With a title taken from a Gilbert and Sullivan song, “A Wandering Minstrel I”, this is a review of the book written by Nick and Sue Fenn on their Diplomatic life, available in Marden library, £10.50 per copy.

In 1959 a young and nervous Nick Fenn applied to the Civil Service, but felt sure he had failed his interview. However to his surprise he was offered a position in HM Diplomatic Service, which he accepted. He quickly sent off a ‘formal’ telegram to his fiancée, Susan (a student at St Andrew’s University) requesting her company in early August at their wedding. Sue, equally formally, accepted. Nick was instructed to learn Burmese, as his first posting would be to Burma. When his posting came through, Sue (who was working as a biochemist and was earning twice Nick’s salary) gave up her career to join Nick. Burma, although rich in teak, fish and self-sufficient in energy, remains one of the world’s poorest countries. Buddhism teaches karma and reincarnation and the acceptance of one’s lot in life, which goes a long way to explain the acceptance of their poor way of life. Sue and Nick quickly adapted to this totally different country, learning to live with the different customs, snakes, termites and rats. Sue determined to use her skills, joined a research department. Their time in Burma ended, and they returned to London with their growing family. Back home Sue concentrated on the family while Nick worked with diplomats and politicians.

The next posting was Algeria. After that to the UN in New York, where Sue worked for the “Headstart Programme for Deprived Children”, to encourage learning and teach the parents to play with their children – an educational and fun experience. Sue and Nick were very aware of a large pro IRA lobby in the USA and strong anti-British feelings made life at times very uncomfortable. Over some issues the Americans were disappointed at the lack of support from Britain - the feeling was that without US intervention in WW2 Britain would have lost, and that now that help should be repaid by total loyalty in issues such as attitudes towards China.

Next they returned to London, where Nick worked in the Department Science and Technology looking at peaceful uses of atomic energy and other scientific matters, he felt well suited with a degree in mediaeval history! While in the UK they found a property in Chainhurst, Marden and started to feel this was where their future lay. China beckoned next, in the final years of Chairman Mao – so this was a turbulent time not helped by a massive earthquake hitting China, killing 800,000 people. They travelled widely within China, but sadly were not able to visit Pakhoi, where Sue was born and had lived for her first two years “for reasons of Military Security!” Back to the UK again, where Nick spent a year at the Royal College of Defence in 1978, and under the new Conservative government he became head of News Department at the Foreign Office. Sue decided to do some B&B for foreign visitors (while Nick had a pied- a-terre in London), but found Inland Revenue interference became such a nuisance that she stopped. After this she took in student midwives attached to Marden Medical Centre.

Trouble in Rhodesia and South Africa loomed, and Nick had to spend 3 months in Harare helping Lords Carrington and Soames negotiate independence for Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Nick was never far from what was happening in a fast-changing world. He visited 81 countries with Lord Carrington over 3 years, until the Falklands War which led to Carrington’s resignation.

Then, after 19 years, back to Burma, this time as Ambassador, but with a staff of only eight, compared with the 50 there had been in 1960. The family again encountered government corruption, and apathy towards the poorer citizens. Sue and Nick went trekking in the Himalayas and had various adventures such as white-water rafting.



Fenn family in Rangoon 1983

Then he became Ambassador in Dublin, Ireland for 5 years. Sue had learned some of the language in every country they had visited and now proceeded to learn Irish, well enough to be interviewed on Irish TV. Police protection was essential for Nick, and after one family holiday a long-lens picture of him appeared in an IRA newspaper with the caption “We let Fenn go”. After a bruising interview with Margaret Thatcher explaining the Irish government’s view of Anglo/Irish relations, he half-expected to be sacked. He was knighted instead!

In 1991 Nick became High Commissioner in India based in New Delhi – a country very rich and very poor at the same time. The caste system was difficult to understand. Sue worked hard on the garden and house, charity and fund raising and was involved in amateur productions, three of which were put on in the garden. Pantos were put on at Christmas, with a Christmas Day tradition of a Trial of the

High Commissioner and total immersion in the swimming pool. Bubonic Plague broke out near Bombay, but modern medical techniques helped keep it under control. Staff in the British High Commission stayed at their posts while many other staff in other embassies hastily left the country. Nick tried to negotiate for the release of British hostages in Kashmir but was unsuccessful as the Government would not offer a ransom – 4 people were executed. Nick felt very bad about this event.

In 1996 they left India as Nick was now 60. With retirement they used their varied cultural experiences in many ways. Sue was a JP and became a governor of Bethany School. Nick became a church warden at St. Michael’s and All Angels and patron of various local charities. For 10 years he worked as CEO and Chairman of Marie Curie Cancer Care. Their interest in Burma continued, and they have visited the country many times – particularly the Christian Community in Kachin, Myanmar. Sadly Nick is no longer with us, but Sue is still an active member of the local community.

I found this a highly enjoyable read and would recommend it to anyone with its social rather than political look at the turbulent latter half of the 20th century. I suspect there are many interesting tales to be told about political figures and outlooks, but this book is a personal account of their lives – and maybe, just maybe, protocol and confidentiality forbid a closer account! Buy the book, I don’t think you will regret it.

MO CLAYTON

SPIDER VERSUS TOAD IN MARDEN – and the winner is..... the spider!

Henry (or Heinrich) Oldenburg FRS was a German Theologian who became the first secretary of the Royal Society. He held the society together during its first decade, writing 250-300 letters each year and constructing a web of scientists and naturalists across Europe. This included Francis Willughby, a naturalist at Cambridge who studied under John Ray and became the first true ornithologist. Sadly he died from pleurisy during the preparation his book *Ornithologiae libri tres*, but after his death Ray published it in 1676, with an English edition two years later

In 1670 Oldenburg wrote to Willughby to tell him of a letter he had received from Israel Tonge, another FRS about a duel between a spider and a toad. Willughby asked for further information and Tonge visited the site of the alleged duel, the garden of the White Lyon Alehouse in Marden. He sent the following account, given by the sole surviving witness, one Elias Rolfe who told him that the incident occurred some 20 years earlier when he was 10 or 11 years old:

“He and several others of the household heard a strange squeaking noise, and going forth to fetch some billets from the woodpile, he perceived that the noise they had heard in the brewhouse, was made by a toad in a fight with a spider. The manner of their fight was like that of two fighting cocks sometimes approaching, sometimes retreating. The manner by which the toad did labour to defend himself was by spitting which he cast from him a foot or two, and the spider avoided it by leaping up on high, so sometimes she would leap a foot right up from the ground. This skirmish continued for the space of an hour and more, till at last the spider got upon the toad and killed him. The spider was a large one of the bigness of a child’s fingers end and white bagged, had a white dun list down her sad coloured back.”

Tonge found other people in the village who had apparently witnessed other spider/toad incidents. One described how the spider jumps on the back of the toad and “fastens her teeth into his neck in the place where his head is joined to his body” then let go when the toad squeaked.

Tonge asked Oldenburg to “request Mr Willughby’s information of whom I long since was informed that he is curious in such observations”. However there is no record of any reply or opinion of the matter from Willughby.