

Local History County Yarns

David Arnold would like to hear from readers of *County Yarns* who have stories and illustrations about Sussex to share with us. Email david.arnold@me.com or write to him at 14 St John Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2QE.

How one Lewes road yielded two fine stories for the Beeb

Last week in an early Tuesday morning telephone call Lewes FC Director Charlie Dobres asked whether my wife Barbara and myself might be available for an interview with BBC TV at the Dripping Pan that lunchtime.

A book featuring "British Football's Greatest Grounds" had just been published and out of 100 "must-see non-league football venues", the Dripping Pan in Mountfield Road had been voted the best in Britain for location, ambience, food, fans and Harvey's Sussex beer.

The award had caught the BBC's attention and they were sending along newsman Piers Hopkirk to report. With Barbara and myself being Lewes FC Life Members and, more importantly, living just minutes from the ground, we were Charlie's first choice to face the camera and share with the viewing public this windfall slice of soccer glory.

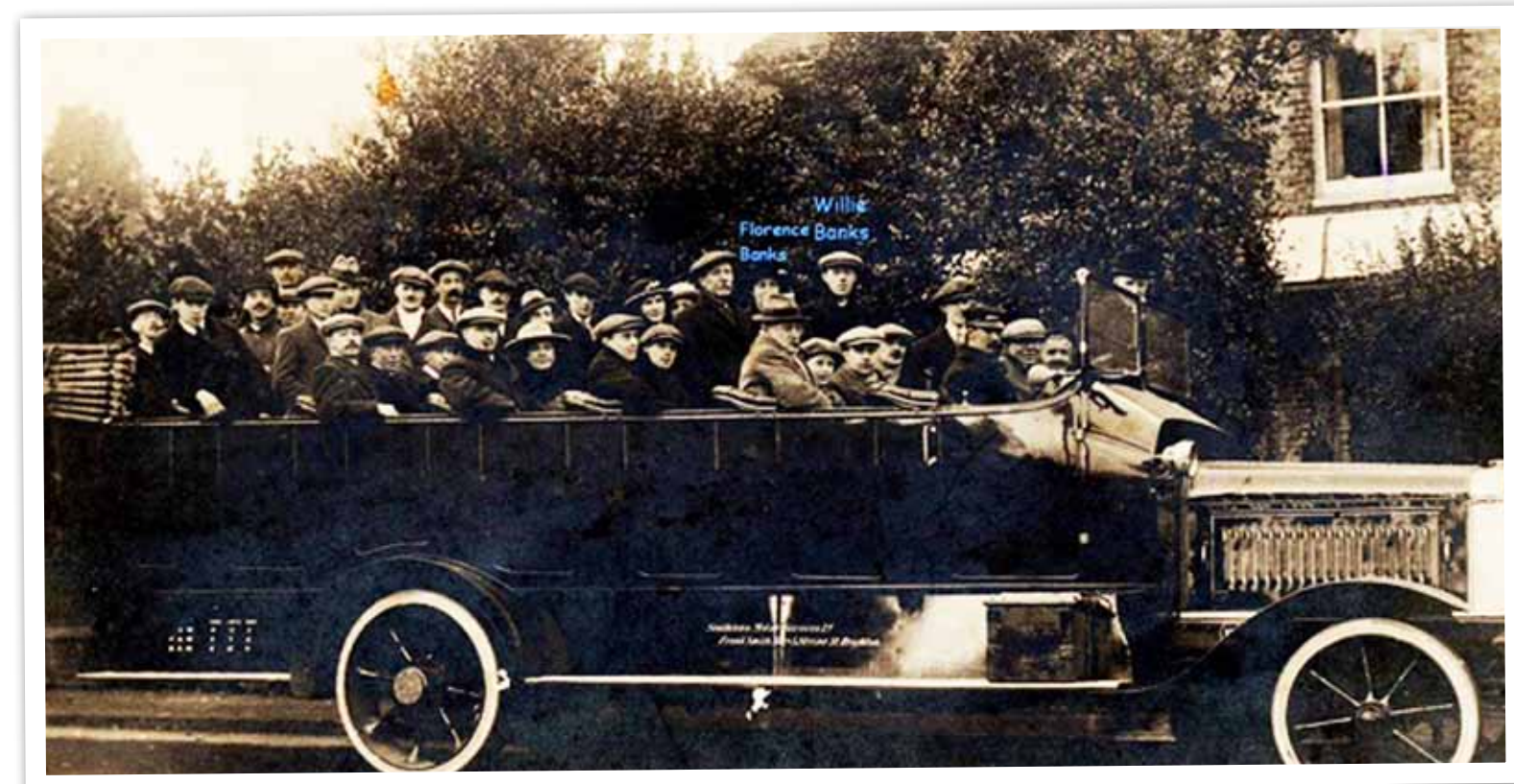
Piers got his footage and the piece duly went out that evening prefaced by a batch of evocative photographs of the Pan and some teams of yesteryear. These included the coach (above right) packed with Lewes fans setting off on an away day in Edwardian times. Given the hats sported by the men it must surely have been a "Cap" tie!

I suspect that the lockdown massively increased the audience for the BBC because for days after we heard from fellow fans and friends how they'd spotted our five minutes of TV fame and accompanying great coverage for Lewes.

I had pitched myself to Piers as being de facto historian for the Dripping Pan. Thus I could confidently impart nuggets of Panlore such as that prior to the football club being founded in 1885, the ground had actually been a major cricketing venue where players like the legendary W.G. Grace had once wielded a bat.

At this point neither Piers nor I had actually seen the "Greatest Grounds" book. So upon eventually securing a copy I was pleasantly surprised to find that many of the 3,000 words devoted to Lewes FC were attributed to "Rooks historian David Arnold". Book compiler Mike Bayly had cleverly lifted a whole slew of potted Pan histories that I'd penned over many years for inclusion in match programmes. Resourceful chap!

Before Piers departed I took the opportunity to inform him that next day Mountfield Road would be the scene of a rather special event linked to the Armistice Day



commemorations at the Memorial Chapel in the grounds of Priory School. Canny newshound that he was, Piers pledged that he'd be back next morning to record for posterity the repaired Chapel bell ringing out for the first time in half a century. Each peal of the bell would honour one of the 55 former pupils of the old Lewes Grammar School for Boys killed on active service in the Second World War. The tragic story made for a very moving and poignant tribute on the BBC that Armistice Day evening.

Piers was pleased to get a second news item from Lewes "in the can". He told me that as a rookie reporter his first boss insisted that whenever he went out on an assignment he must make sure to get the next day's shoot subject sorted before he went home. Otherwise he risked a sleepless night worrying about how he would fill next day's slot.

One of the 55 who lost their lives was sapper Fred Moore and we managed to establish a telephone link to his brother Ray in Cheshire. Ray's nephew, Seaford resident Peter Fellows subsequently wrote: "Thank you so very much indeed for enabling my uncle to hear the Chapel bell ringing. You probably know that he is 94 years old, physically frail but with a mind still razor sharp!

"I also noted your column concerning John Davey's photograph of Monsieur Duval's Caudron aircraft at Rise Farm. I have the same image hanging on a wall of my home. For

Above: Lewes FC fans aboard a charabanc about to set off for an away match circa 1911. The image is from John Davey's collection and Florence and Willie Banks who are identified in the photograph were John's grandparents.

Below: This poster for "Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines" features famously gap-toothed Terry Thomas who is also pictured with co-star Eric Sykes. Terry's "excessive ad libbing" as a schoolboy saw him expelled from Ardingly College in Sussex. Below (top right): The extraordinary Lee-Richards Annular aircraft were built in Shoreham.

the record I am an aviation historian and tour guide at Shoreham, the oldest licensed airfield in Britain."

Peter continued: "The 1965 comedy 'Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines' was loosely based on the air race entered by M. Duval. Another participant ran out of fuel and landed at South Heighton near Newhaven. Unfortunately, the aircraft had no brakes and crashed into a hedge, the impact severing the machine's tail.

"In the film one of the planes had round wings. It came to grief when a blast from an angry German officer armed with a blunderbuss sent it diving into a manure heap.

"The original of this aircraft was constructed at Shoreham by

two engineers. The Lee-Richards Annular (meaning 'round') came in monoplane and biplane variants. Neither type was a success, being quite unstable.

"I helped build a full size non-flying replica of the Annular biplane some years ago. This now resides in the Newark Air Museum in Nottinghamshire."

To me these ungainly-looking ring-shaped aircraft resemble nothing so much as flying saucers put together by Heath Robinson. In 1913 one of the Annular test pilots was Gordon England. Five years earlier he'd entered the record books after making the world's first-ever glider flight over the Downs in West Sussex.

