

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.

Why a bell ringing in Lewes was heard by Ray Moore in Cheshire

The complications of lockdown affected an historic event at a unique war memorial Chapel in Lewes last Wednesday morning, 11th November.

The occasion was the commemoration of Armistice Day when the fallen of the two world wars are remembered.

The Chapel in question is in the grounds of Priory School in Mountfield Road. It was built to honour the sacrifice of 55 former pupils of Lewes County Grammar School for Boys who died on active service in the Second World War.

Driving force behind the building's construction was Headmaster Neville Bradshaw. In 1942, appalled at the rising toll of "his boys" losing their lives in the conflict, he determined that post-war there should be a Chapel dedicated to their memory.

Little did the teacher know what a herculean task he was undertaking. Indeed it was not until July 1960 that the Chapel was finally completed and opened in a ceremony that drew some 1,500 people. Three weeks later Bradshaw retired after three decades as Headmaster.

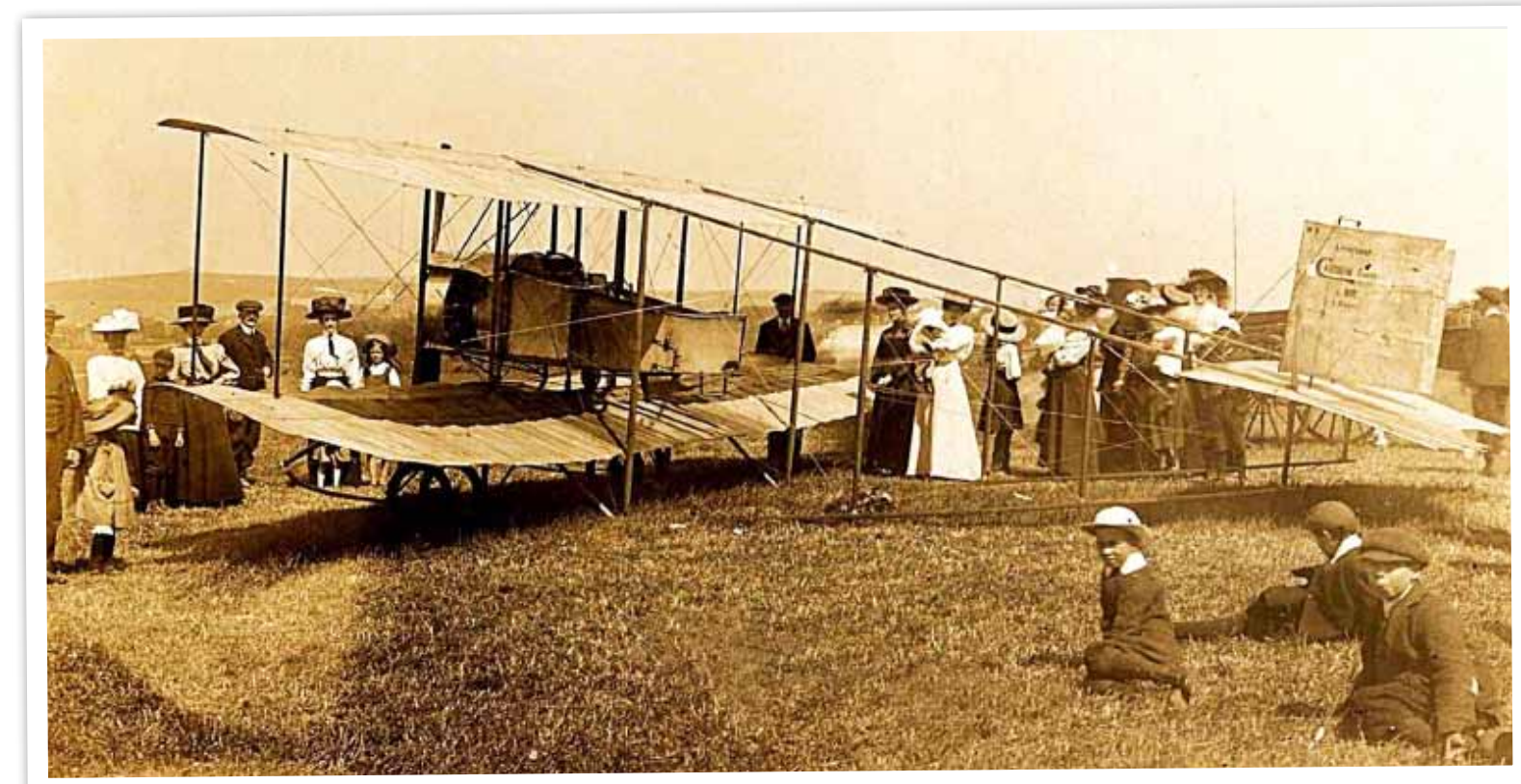
In 1969 the Grammar School was closed and the school buildings with the Chapel were subsumed with the next-door Secondary School into the comprehensive establishment that is now Priory School.

The history of the Chapel has been preserved through a Committee of Trustees, all of them, with the exception of myself, being former Grammar School attendees. The Committee has worked with Priory School on various initiatives linked to the building, a good example being a scholarship for musically-minded pupils wishing to master the Chapel organ.

The Trustees also fundraise to assist with the upkeep of the fabric of the building. The latest project was to have the Chapel bell restored so that it could be rung again after decades of silence. Chapel Trustee John Murray supervised the operation.

Fellow Trustee John Davey approached Priory School Headmaster Tony Smith with the suggestion that the newly repaired bell be rung 55 times from 11am on Armistice Day. This was agreed and although there could be no admission to the Chapel interior on the day it was viewed as desirable that interested members of the public could gather outside (socially distanced!) for the occasion.

The latest lockdown put paid to announcing this in advance although the bell ringing itself would still take place. Even so, word had got out to



several former pupils. One of these being Ray Moore, brother of Fred Moore, one of the 55 who was killed on 2nd October 1944 in Italy. Having made a substantial donation towards the cost of the bell repairs and unable to make the journey from his Cheshire home, Ray dearly wished that he could hear the peals of the bell.

Step forward several volunteers who arranged to do just that and record the event for Ray and posterity.

In the meantime, I heard again from John Davey. He has a massive collection of wonderful old photographs of Lewes. When he saw the images taken at Haywards Heath and Roedean of early flying machines that appeared in my last week's column, he at once delved into his archive to produce a superb photograph of an early aircraft on the ground near Lewes.

The "Sussex Express" of Friday 7th July 1911 carried photographs and a story relating to the Caudron biplane, flown by a Monsieur Duval, who had made a forced landing at Rise Farm in the Southover area on the previous Tuesday.

The newspaper reported that Duval had competed in the inaugural Paris to London air race: "This week Lewes and many other places in Sussex saw flying machines overhead for the first time. They had their great day on Monday, when 11 of the competitors in the European air race arrived from Dover, coming westward to the Shoreham

Above: The Caudron biplane of French air racer Monsieur Duval at Rise Farm, Lewes in July 1911. Faintly visible behind the engine is the town's prison with Lewes race-course grandstand on the horizon.

Below right: Royal Engineers sapper Fred Moore. The Lewes Grammar School "Old Boy" was killed on 2nd October 1944 in the course of the Italian Campaign. Left: The Memorial Chapel's bell was recently repaired and was rung on Armistice Day 2020 to honour the 55 Grammar School alumni who lost their lives in World War II. The sound of the bell was relayed by 'phone to Fred's brother, Ray, at his Cheshire home.

aerodrome and then continuing their flight to Hendon in North London.

"Most competitors were French and first prize was £2,500. There were some mishaps to the aviators in Sussex but no injuries."

One of those mishaps befell Duval. Engine trouble first delayed his Paris departure by a whole day. Earning the description of "lame duck", it was more mechanical trouble that grounded him at Rise Farm from where he proceeded on foot to overnight at the White Hart Hotel on Lewes High Street.

From dawn the next morning a crowd assembled around the grounded machine anticipating the return of the pilot and the resumption of his flight. The

newspaper continued: "In this the spectators were disappointed. Instead of Monsieur Duval, a mechanic appeared and set to work tinkering with the engine."

Later that morning, Duval was reunited with his repaired aircraft and was able to take off. It was noted though that the biplane's wings were covered with the signatures of scores of Lewes people!

Fred and Ray Moore lived in Eastport Lane in Southover and both the Lewes Grammar School in Mountfield Road and Rise Farm in the Ouse Valley were within half a mile of their home.

Today there is a grass airstrip close to Rise Farm that is suitable for light planes.

