

# THE IRISH CONNECTION - ARCHITECTS IN WORKING IN THE LATE 1880's

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Working has a wealth of 'Surrey Style' properties - Arts & Crafts properties often by un-known architects or ones whose careers have now become largely forgotten.

Last week we looked at the mosque at Maybury designed by William Isaac Chambers – probably his best known piece of work - but how many know that he once lived in this area (practicing from a property known as 'The Studio' in 1888) and designed other buildings



Where exactly on the Mount Hermon Estate, W I Chambers' house was is not known (nor whether it still stands).

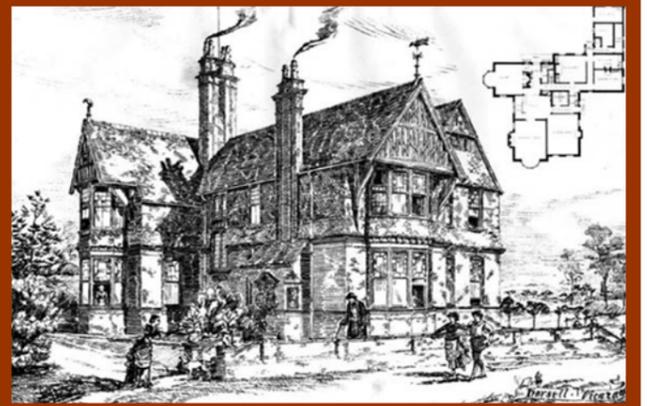
in this area, such as this house in Mount Hermon, the front elevation of which was featured in *The Architect* on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1888.

The former farmland of Mount Hermon was being sold off for development at this time, although Edward Ryde records in his diary on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1888 that the land was 'little sold', possibly because the London Necropolis Company were also selling large areas for housing at the time.

W I Chambers was born in Cambridgeshire, but later moved to Darlington where he trained as an architect before moving to Edinburgh and Ireland where he designed a number of properties in Dundalk and Dublin, including a Queen-Anne Style house called Kensington Lodge at Grove Park, Dublin which he built for himself in 1882.

Also in Ireland at this time (although mainly working in Essex) was Ernest Claude Lee who in 1883 apparently won a competition to design the Dublin Museum of Science & Art. Unfortunately his design was never built as there was outcry that no Irish architects were considered, so a second competition was held (Lee receiving compensation for his troubles)!

E C Lee's design for the Rev Back's new Vicarage at Horsell is now St Andrew's School (with a few extensions)!



A much more modest design by Lee, for the Vicarage at Horsell, was displayed in *The Building News* the following September. The building was completed by 1888, but was sold just four years later upon the death of the Vicar of Horsell, the Rev John Back. The sales brochure listed '5 bedrooms, stables and coachman's rooms, gardens, gardener's house, bailiff's cottage, farm buildings, two further cottages, pasture and arable land of approximately ninety-three acres.' It is now St Andrews School.

During the Rev Back's time, Horsell Church had been restored by William Frederick Unsworth (the architect of Christ Church in Woking). In 1889 Unsworth was building a new house for himself in Woodham Lane, known as Woodhambury.

Ian Nairn in *The Buildings of England, Surrey* (Penguin, 1962) describes the house as 'taking up the Norman Shaw style at its prettiest' with a 'long roof-line with a big tile-hung gable – tiny windows with tiny panes' the whole 'done quite simply without affectation or coyness'.

As well as designing Woodhambury, Unsworth also went on to design All Saints Church at Woodham, Maybury Knowle in The Ridge at Maybury and Saracens in Saunders Lane at Mayford, but he is probably best known as the designer of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and



W F Unsworth's most famous design was for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre & Library.



Library in Stratford-upon-Avon which he designed in 1879. Sadly that building was destroyed by fire in 1926 and replaced by the current Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 1932.

In Ireland, however, he is remembered for designing the workers village at Sion Mills in County Tyrone for the Herdman family.

An old flour mill was converted into a flax mill in the 1830's by the Herdman Brothers, James, John and George, but it is the work of Unsworth in the 1880s (and later) for which the village is best known.

Unsworth married Julia Elizabeth Herdman, the daughter of James Herdman in Bath in 1873, proving that it is not necessarily always what you know, but who you know that counts!



W F Unsworth's house in Woodham Lane backed onto the Basingstoke Canal, as can be seen from this Victorian postcard, thought to show the architect and his family.

# THE COUNTESS OF MEATH'S HOMES 1888-89



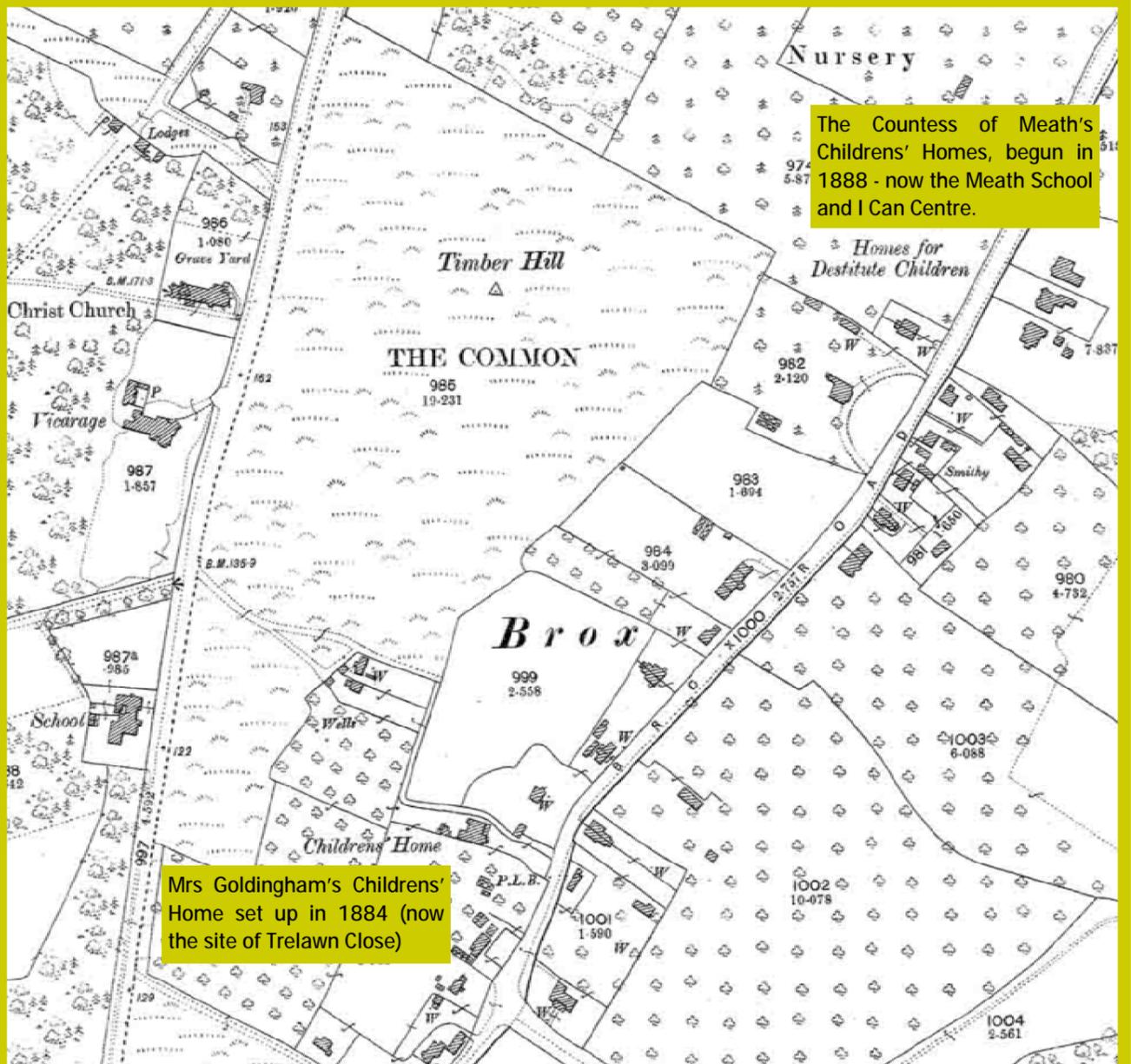
In 1884 Mrs Louisa Goldingham of Anningsley Park in Ottershaw founded a Children's Home in Brox Road in memory of her husband.

Not to be outdone, her great friend and neighbour the Countess of Meath the following year founded the 'Ministering Children's League' to encourage children to help in charitable works'. Its motto was 'No day without a deed to crown it' and the objective was to 'promote kindness, unselfishness, and the habit of usefulness amongst children, and to create in their minds an earnest desire to help the needy and suffering'.

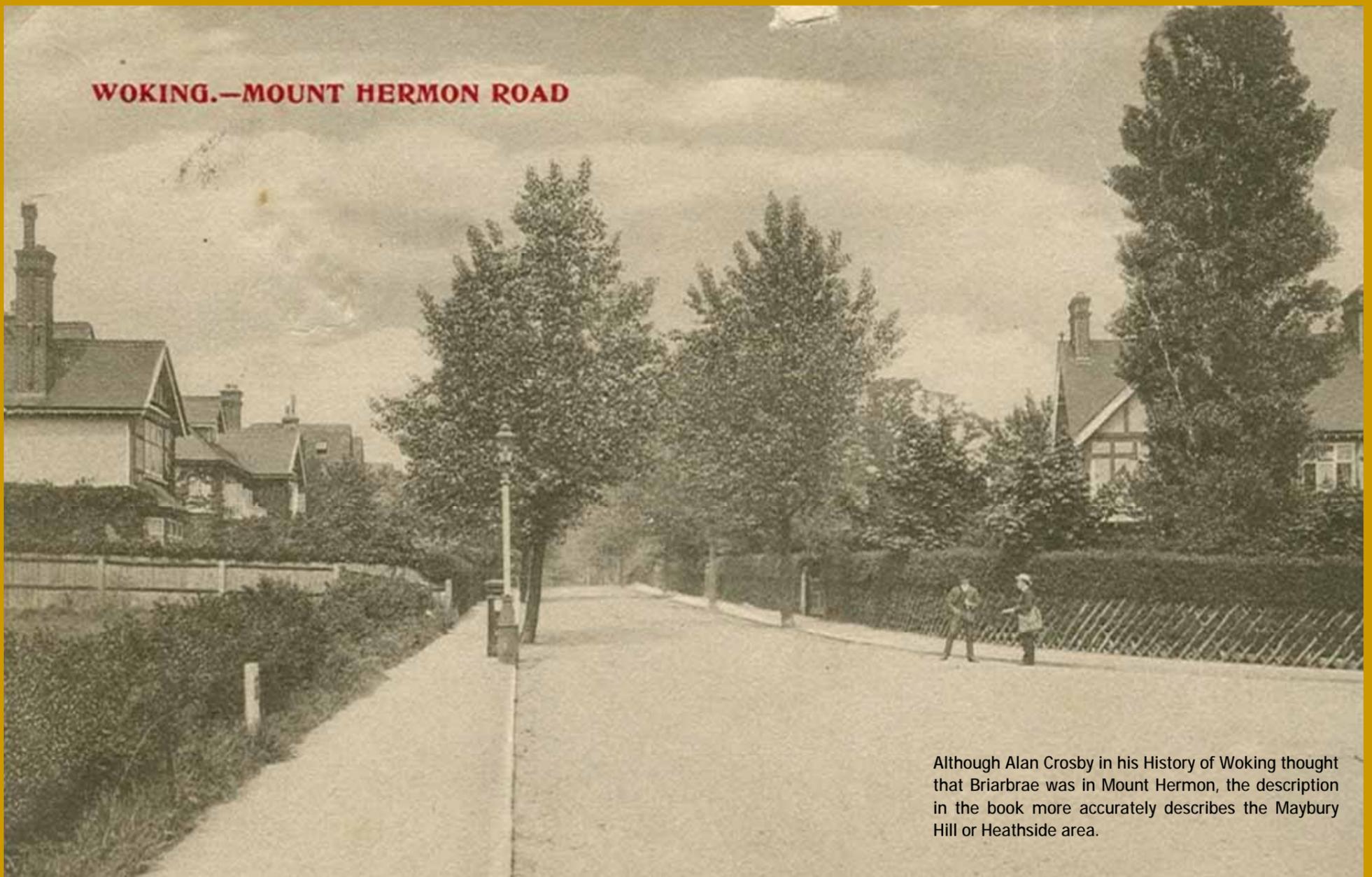
It wasn't long before the Countess too thought of setting up a Children's Home in the village and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1888 her cousin, the Countess of Lathom, opened the Ministering Children's League's first home (for girls) in Brox Road with the foundation stone of the second home (for boys) being laid at the same time.

The organisation later had over 40,000 members worldwide with 500 branches and no less than twenty-two homes and institutions in the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, India and even Russia, China and Japan. There was an Industrial School for the Blind in Egypt and more locally a Home for the 'Comfort of Epileptic Women and Girls' in Godalming, with the Home in Ottershaw later being taken over by the Children's Aid Association.

Another great example of local Victorian philanthropy.



# THE NAVAL TREATY



Although Alan Crosby in his *History of Woking* thought that Briarbrae was in Mount Hermon, the description in the book more accurately describes the Maybury Hill or Heathside area.

About 1889 a mysterious robbery took place that involved a gentleman called Percy 'Tadpole' Phelps of Briarbrae in Woking.

I cannot tell you exactly where 'Briarbrae' was, nor should I tell exactly what happened in the robbery – not least because the house and robbery were purely fictional and I don't want to spoil the plot.

Both were the results of the imagination of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose short story 'The Naval Treaty' brings Sherlock Holmes and his side-kick Dr Watson (old school chum of 'Tadpole') to Woking.

'We were fortunate enough to catch an early train at Waterloo, and in a little under an hour we found ourselves among the fir-woods and the heather of Woking. Briarbrae proved to be a large detached house standing in extensive grounds within a few minutes' walk of the station'.



Alan Crosby in his '*History of Woking*' thought the above accurately described the Mount Hermon district, which as we have seen in recent weeks was being developed at that time, but from another part of the story it is evident that the property had at least eight bedrooms so Hook Heath or Heathside/ Maybury Hill would probably be more likely. The fact – if you can call it that in a novel - that Holmes was able to hear 'a church-clock down at Woking which struck the quarters' whilst he

was hiding in the rhododendron bushes, does seem to point more to Heathside or Maybury Hill, but it would be impossible to be any more precise.

Although the story was set in 1889 it was published in 1893 (in *The Strand*, from where Sidney Paget's illustrations of the story shown here are taken), which probably explains why Briarbrae had gas three years BEFORE Woking's gas works were built – but then if the house didn't have gas... oops I nearly gave away a vital part of the plot.

