

THE GODALMING TRUST

Autumn/Winter Newsletter 2025



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*Working
to maintain
our heritage
and quality
of life*

The Godalming Trust is an independent body, not funded by the Councils, and all activities are organised and staffed by volunteers. Its campaigning role needs the financial support and interest of all those who care for the Godalming of today and tomorrow.

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Front Cover: Norney Grange by John Gouldsmith, Back Cover: Munstead Wood by John Gouldsmith

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Graham Kimber – Vice Chairman

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Richard Gidlow – Honorary Treasurer

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

2025 was our 60th Anniversary and I think I can say it was a successful and enjoyable year.

Our visits to Norney Grange and Munstead Wood for members were one of the highlights. These visits inspired one of our members, John Gouldsmith, to paint the two sketches which he has generously allowed us to use in this Newsletter. Following the visit to Munstead Wood and at the suggestion of the members who went there, we have made a donation of £500 specifically to the Munstead Wood project, rather than for general use of the National Trust. There is more on these visits and plans for 2026 on pages 5 and 6.

The summer guided town history walks again proved very popular, in fact the August one had an unprecedented number turn up, more than 40 people. Graham Kimber and I quickly decided to do two walks that afternoon and did an additional walk in October to cater for those disappointed not to do the August High Street walk.

The Committee were pleased to see so many members, old and new, at the AGM. The talk by Robin Stannard on Henry Woodyer, I hope encouraged many of you to visit St Peter's Hascombe during Heritage Open Days. If not, the church is regularly open and well worth a visit. We are grateful to the Masonic Centre for allowing us to hold our AGM there. The speaker asked that we made a donation to another local Woodyer church, St Andrews in Grafham and we have given them £50.

Unfortunately, we did not have our usual base at the Pepperpot for Heritage Open Days due to the ongoing repair work so were unable to offer advice and directions to nearby properties. The on line ticketing trial did not work well for all the properties open. We shall be working with Godalming Town Council to return to the issue of physical tickets for most properties in 2026 and only Munstead Wood will be on line

and balloted. We are grateful to the Town Council for all their help and support in Heritage Open Days.

There is an update on Planning on pages 7 and 8 and we also have an article by John Whitbourn, the amateur local historian who has found out about the areas early link to Buddhism in the UK.

We welcome any feedback from members, on the newsletters, events, AGM and we want them particularly on visits (see pages 5 and 6).

Pam Talbot

MEMBERS VISITS 2025 AND 2026

Some 30 plus members enjoyed visits to both Norney Grange and Munstead Wood this summer. Both of these venues suggested a visit for members at an earlier time of year to see the gardens, for example, when the azaleas are flowering. It is possible it will just be a visit to the gardens unless there are members who missed out on the earlier visits and would like to see the houses. Please can you let us know if you would like to visit one or both gardens in the spring time so we can gauge the interest in organising visits. If you would like to see the houses too, please also let us know. Email the Chairman pamtalbot@clara.co.uk.



Norney Grange

We are also planning to arrange a visit in July 2026 to another Arts and Crafts house, Westbrook*. Numbers will be very limited and full details will be circulated to members next Spring.

An early 20th-century formal garden designed by Hugh Thackeray Turner with Gertrude Jekyll, surrounding an Arts and Crafts house, designed by H Thackeray Turner for himself. Both house and garden are Grade II listed. The garden retains much (but not all) of its layout and original features by Jekyll. It was restored by the present owners in 2010/11. Thackeray Turner was the architect of Godalming's Phillips Memorial Cloister, where he also collaborated with Jekyll who did the garden and planting design. He was also secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings for some 28 years. For more information, please visit <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001671>.



The main flower border, Munstead Wood

GODALMING TRUST PLANNING REPORT.

Local Planning Applications

We continue to monitor all Planning Applications in the Godalming area and, whilst the majority of applications are for minor 'Household' extensions and alterations, we do comment to Waverley Borough Council if we feel there is need. We rarely get involved in Household applications unless they affect a Listed Building or are in a Conservation Area.

As always, we welcome your input if you think an application would be worthy of our interest, especially if you think an application may have been missed by us.

Comments to Waverley

In recent months we have expressed concerns regarding the addition of two floors on top of the existing Wetherspoons building (which was subsequently granted permission sadly) and a similar application for Thornbrook House, Catteshall Lane.

The application for a cycle route through the Philips Memorial Park has been withdrawn but we are expecting it to be resubmitted, so need to keep a close eye on that. We are also supporting the Town Council in their objections to landscaping alterations at Westbrook Mills in Borough Road.

On a positive note, we were pleased to support the repair and refurbishment works to the Pepperpot - the scaffold is slowly coming down, and we can now see that our iconic town centre building has been restored to its former glory.

Unitary Authorities for Surrey

As you will probably have seen in the local news, Waverley and the other Surrey Borough and District Councils are to be replaced with two 'unitary' authorities - East Surrey and West Surrey, which will include the Waverley area together with Guildford, Woking, Surrey Heath, Runnymede and Spelthorne. It is far too soon to understand how this will affect the local planning process but it is suggested that Town and

Parish Councils may be given more power to preserve the local input to planning decisions.

Civic Design Awards

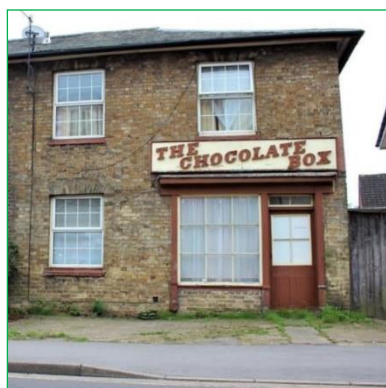
Sadly, due to the low number of nominations, we decided to postpone the Godalming Trust Civic Design Awards until next year. There were a few entrants that are interesting and will be looked at in more detail and we hope that another twelve months may see other projects come to fruition and be suitable for consideration.

The Chocolate Box

After sweet rationing was finally removed in 1953, many generations of local children will happily remember spending their pocket money in The Chocolate Box sweet shop in Farncombe Street. Since the 1980s, when the shop closed, it has served as offices and residential but there was always an agreement with the owners that the shop frontage should be kept as it was.

The 'classic' 1960s wooden sign over the shop front was finally removed this summer due to rot, but to the delight of those with very long memories, an older painted sign was exposed and, following the refurbishment of the premises, will now hopefully be retained to remind current and future generations of the building's history.

David Else



Photographs by kind permission of Godalming Past & Present Facebook page

GODALMING'S (AND BRITAIN'S) FIRST BUDDHIST?

By John Whitbourn

Members of the Godalming Trust might be interested to hear that the Godalming area was home to the first known English (or indeed British) adherent to Buddhism. As a consequence of which it also boasts what is almost certainly the earliest custom-built shrine raised for Buddhist devotional purposes in these islands.

Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen (6 July 1834–2 December 1923) was a soldier, explorer, mountaineer and naturalist, born into a long established and distinguished southwest Surrey family, the eldest son in a family of eighteen. Today he is primarily remembered for his surveying explorations around 'K2' in the Himalayas, the world's second highest mountain,¹ and also for his Malacological studies (the study of molluscs).² In 1877, after a quarter century of military and other Imperial service in Asia he returned to England finally settling at 'Nore', in Hascombe near Godalming around 1900.

The family tradition holds that Godwin-Austen was a convert to the Buddhist faith, after a period as a Muslim in the middle to late 1850s, relating to his marriage to an Indian woman. She is believed to have died in late 1860.

The small³ Burmese type shrine (as opposed to a '*stupa*', which, strictly defined, houses holy relics) was most probably brought back with him when he left India, intended as a focus for devotions to his new faith. An alternative theory, although less likely, is that the shrine was presented to Godwin-Austen from Burma, circa 1920. This could have been gratitude for his return of an '*old Burmese bell*', in his possession,

¹ Due to its remoteness, the mountain apparently lacked a local name and was initially dubbed Mount Godwin-Austen. However, this was rejected by 'Great Trigonometrical Survey of British India' (in which Godwin-Austen served) in favour of K2. However, a nearby glacier still bears Godwin-Austen's name. For his exploration and surveying of the NW Himalayas he was awarded the Founders Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society

² See '*The K2 Man (and His Molluscs): The Extraordinary Life of Haversham Godwin-Austen*' by Catherine Moorehead (a former Royal Grammar School, Guildford, teacher). 2013. To whom for her kind assistance, many thanks.

³ See my photograph below

to the Shewesandaw Pagoda in Bagan, Burma. It had been seized by the British during the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852. His grandfather commanded the British forces in that conflict and Godwin-Austen himself arrived at the end of hostilities.

Today that Burmese-style Buddhist shrine or stupa still resides at *Nore*, Hascombe, and is likely to have been erected around 1901. Then, following Godwin-Austen's death in 1923, the shrine's significance and even existence were gradually forgotten and it became completely lost to view under brambles, until rediscovered in 1962 by a new owner of *Nore*, the star of stage and screen, Dirk Bogarde.

It seems clear that Godwin-Austen's conversion predates the earliest formal Buddhist missions to Britain: namely those of the Japanese-sponsored '*Buddhist Propagation Society*', led by Irish-born Captain Charles J. W. Pfoundes in 1889, and that of English convert Charles Henry Alan Bennett a.k.a. '*Ananda Metteyya*' in 1908. Hence Godwin-Austen's claim as a 'first' and the consequent pioneering significance of the Hascombe shrine.

The Buddhist Society of Great Britain was formed in 1907.



Photo: The Buddhist Shrine at Nore © John Whitbourn

Please note that the shrine at *Nore* is on private property and not open to the public.

In 2016 English Heritage, in conjunction with the University of Leeds, published a *'Survey of Buddhist Buildings in England'*, and, alerted by the author, Godwin-Austen's shrine in Hascombe was made the subject of a late 'stop press' footnote therein.⁴

A memorial to Godwin-Austen may be found in the nave of St Mary's Church, Shalford, Surrey

In view of Godwin-Austen's additional claim to fame discussed above, the author has taken the liberty of amending his Wikipedia entry accordingly. There is also more information therein on other aspects of Godwin-Austen's life and career.⁵

It is curious to reflect on the implausible vagaries of history, such that our Godalming home should prove to be the not-entirely-predictable host to England's earliest known example of Buddhist adherence.

Thanks are due to the local 'New Buddha Way'⁶ Buddhist group and especially its founder, Professor Geoff Hunt, for their role in helping to revive knowledge of this nigh forgotten 'first' in English history.

For further reading on early British Buddhism, see:

'The First Buddhist Mission to The West: Charles Pfoundes and The London Buddhist Mission of 1889 – 1892.' Brian Bocking, Laurence Cox and Shin'ichi Yoshinaga.

<http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/DISKUS/index.php/DISKUS/article/view/51>

'The Awakening of the West – The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture' Stephen Batchelor. Aquarian. 1994.

⁴ <https://buildingbuddhism.wordpress.com/>

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Haversham_Godwin-Austen

⁶ <https://www.newbuddhaway.org/>



Munstead Wood © John Gouldsmith

Should you wish to contact the Trust on any issue please write to **David Else, Honorary secretary, Winter Cottage, Milford Road, Elstead Godalming GU8 6HY** or info@thegodalmingtrust.org.uk
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