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# A Brief History of Cooper's Hill

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CHRIS TOWLER

MAY 2023

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# Early mentions of Cooper's Hill

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- **1160:** Abbot Hugh of Chertsey gave the site of Coopers Hill to the Priory of Ankerwyke.
  - **1530:** Henry VIII granted the estate to Andrew, Lord of Windsor in which it had become the manor of Parnish.(Parnish/ Purnish: derived from 'pernehos', meaning a stubble of land marked by pear trees.)
  - **1547:** In the Crown Survey of 1547-1550, the first mention of the name "Cowper" appears.
- ❖ The Cowper family were known to be continual offenders against the Forest Laws. (Forest Law protected trees and games of forests that were under authority of the king. It was against the law to clear land, cut wood, hunt or carry bows and spears.)
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# More milestones

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- **1550:** Edward VI gave the site to Sir Thomas Smith, Secretary of State.
- **1652:** Coopers Hill was owned by John Lee in 1652, whose granddaughter married Simon Harcourt.

Therefore, the estate was passed on by marriage to Simon Harcourt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The estate remained in the Harcourt family until it was bought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Baron Albert Grant.....of whom more later!!

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# October 1852: The last fatal duel in England



- Somewhere on Priest Hill
- 2 French revolutionary republicans who had escaped from France where each was “wanted”
- Frédéric Cournet and Emmanuel Barthélemy
- The former had spread malicious rumours about the latter’s girlfriend. DUAL!!
- Several missed shots, especially from B, and then Cournet threw his gun at Barthélemy shouting “Here, use mine”
- He did and fatally wounded his rival who died later at the Barley Mow Inn
- Three years later, Barthélemy was convicted of murder in London and hanged.





Chris Fowler



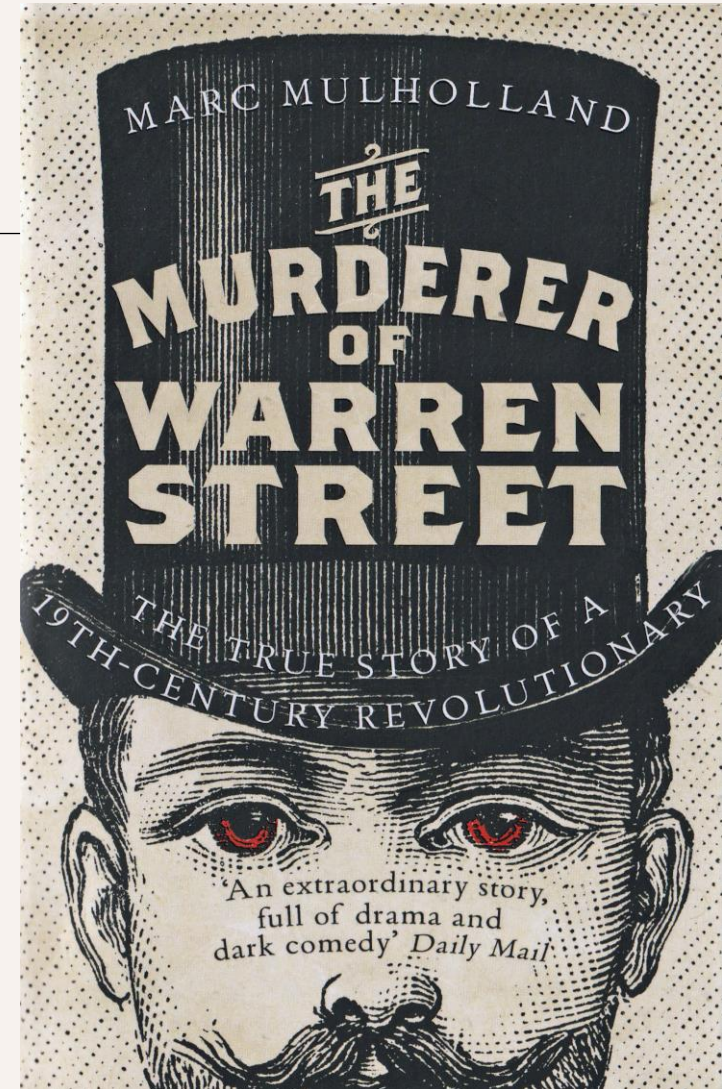
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# Emmanuel Barthélemy

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French revolutionary  
Conspirator  
Jail-breaker  
Fugitive,  
Duellist  
Radical  
Killer

"A charismatic mix of Spartacus,  
The Scarlet Pimpernel and  
Jean Valjean" **The Times.**



# Baron Albert Grant

- **Built current house around 1865**
- Born Abraham Gottheimer, an Irish-born son of a poor Jewish pedlar from central Europe.
- Entered employment as a clerk, later becoming a travelling salesman of wines and in 1859 he established the first of a number of companies, all of which failed at the expense of their shareholders.
- Most probably bought the title of "Baron" in Italy!
- Elected as a Conservative Member of Parliament for the constituency of Kidderminster in 1865 but in 1874 he was unseated for election offences and was denounced as a "fraudulent adventurer".
- A "Bon Vivreur", he is believed to have entertained royalty at his home but he didn't live at Cooper's Hill for long.
- 1870: estate bought for use as Royal Indian Engineering College.
- Grant died in 1899 in relative poverty









# The Royal Indian Engineering College

- Converted for use as a College in 1870.
- New buildings erected: College Hall and a Chapel.
- College Hall (Mowbray) contained a library, lecture theatre, model room, dining hall, laboratory and separate sleeping rooms for each and every student; 100 at first, 150 later.



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# Why create the RIEC?

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- A Public Works Department was created in India in 1854, with responsibility for the construction of roads, canals and other civil engineering projects.
  - It needed qualified staff but UK could not supply the need
  - 1868: Proposal to create a dedicated training college
  - Champion of the idea was Sir George Tomkyns Chesney
  - The India Office bought the Cooper's Hill Estate for £55,00 in 1870
  - College opened on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1872 with Chesney as first President.
  - Fees £150 per year
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# Curriculum

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- Pure and applied mathematics; geometry
  - Construction; architectural design,
  - Surveying,
  - Mechanical drawing,
  - Physics,
  - Geology,
  - Accounts,
  - Hindustani,
  - History and geography of India.
- By 1882, the REIC had ceased to be exclusively for provision of engineers to India
  - Government could not guarantee employment in the UK for all its graduates (expensive education)
  - In 1885, England's first forestry school was created in conjunction with the RIEC
  - 1906: all work at the College was transferred to India or other colleges and the RIEC closed
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# The Arboretum

TREES FROM ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

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# A very brief history of the RIEC

(According to  
The Cooper's  
Hill Magazine  
for 1904)

- **Chapter I, 1870**
- **The Secretary of State:** “I propose to establish the College”
- **Government of India:** “We do not like the idea”
- **The Secretary of State:** “Oh don't you? Then consider it established.”
- **Chapter II, 1903**
- **The Secretary of State:** “I propose to disestablish the College”
- **Government of India:** “Don't do that it has been a great success”
- **The Secretary of State:** “Oh has it? Then consider it disestablished.”



# The next owner: Lady Cheylesmore

(Photo from January 1903)

On 17 January 1911, Baroness Cheylesmore purchased the Cooper's Hill property at Runnymede, for use as a family home.

Born Elizabeth French of New York



# Baron Cheylesmore

Major-General **Herbert Francis Eaton, 3rd Baron Cheylesmore**, GBE, KCMG, KCVO (25 January 1848 – 29 July 1925)  
(Picture from Vanity Fair, October 1891)

British Army officer, sportsman, and peer.

He was Chairman of London County Council, chairman of the National Rifle Association and presided over courts martial during the First World War.



Watershed Digital Art



A large, green and red mechanical well pump structure is the central focus, housed under a yellow canopy. The structure features a large flywheel and various gears. In the background, a modern, multi-story building with balconies is visible. The scene is set outdoors on a paved area.

The Lady Cheylesmore  
Artesian Well



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# Herbert's death and reminders at Coopers Hill

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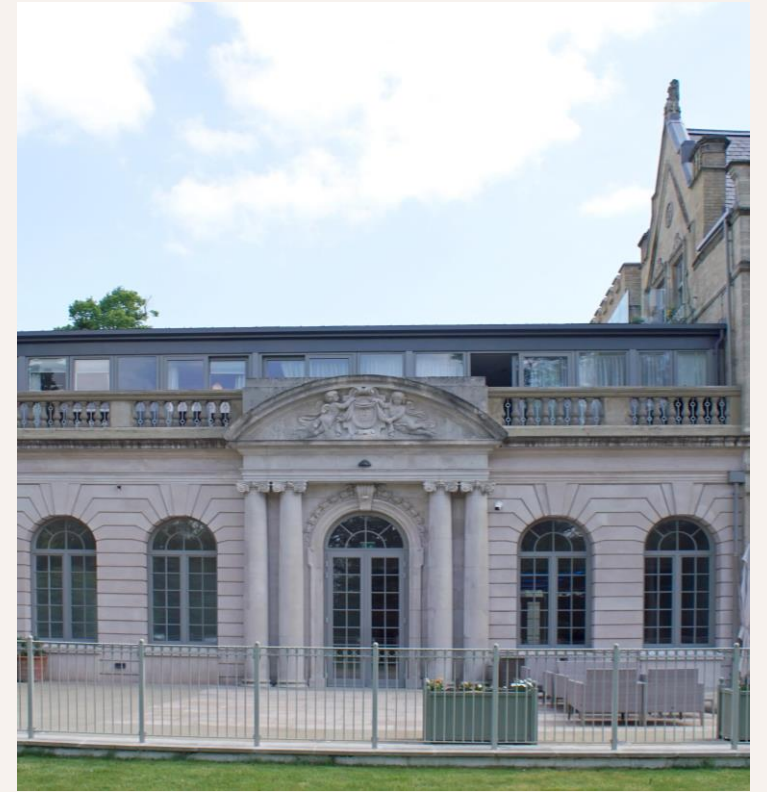
- Cheylesmore was honoured Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire in June 1925. He died a month later aged 77, in a motor accident, the first peer to suffer such a fate in Britain.
  - The family were devastated and a ballroom which was being built for his son's 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday Party was left unfinished.
  - The ballroom served different purposes for subsequent occupiers of the site.
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Ballroom – Pillar Hall – Spa

“Photos from the Brunel  
University days”





Ballroom – Pillar Hall – Spa

Today

# “The London County Council years”

- The site was acquired just before World War II by the London County Council which opened a temporary Emergency Training College there in 1946
- This College closed in 1951
- During the war, Eros was housed in the “Eros room” – now the Hobbies Room
- Returned to Piccadilly Circus in June 1947





1947: Performance of St  
Joan



# Shoreditch Training College

- Originally established in London in the early 1900s to develop skills in handicrafts
- to improve the standard of teaching in London's Manual Training Centres
- 1951: moved to larger premises at Cooper's Hill
- Still funded by the London CC



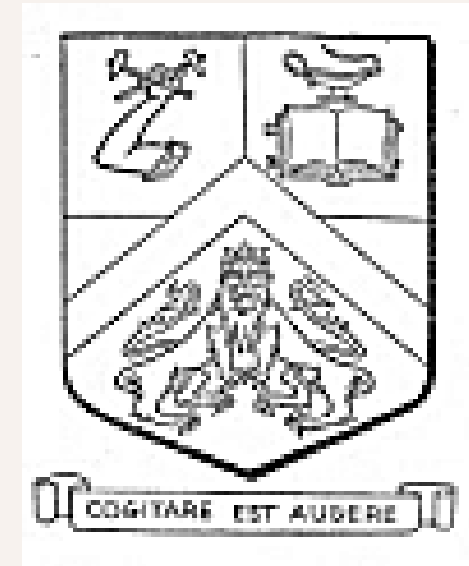


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# Shoreditch Training College

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- At Cooper's Hill, the STC became a residential College, teaching 550 students by 1964
- Then, although one of the leading colleges in Craft, Design and Technology, demand for these skills decreased
- 1980: forced merger with Brunel University to teach Design and Technology (handicraft focus lost)
- But, the contribution of STC is still applauded.





Official opening





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# Elton John

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May 1978:

- Band scheduled for an event cancelled at the last minute
  - 2 students managed to secure the services of Elton John
  - For free!
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# Brunel University

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- Merged with Shoreditch College in 1980
- In the late 1990s Brunel devised a 10-year, £250 million masterplan for the campus. This involved selling off various campus sites, including Cooper's Hill which was in great need of repair.
- In May 2007 the Runnymede campus site was sold for £46.6M to the Oracle Group. The assets were later transferred to a new entity called 'Orchid Runnymede'.
- In 2011 a new planning application was submitted to Runnymede Borough Council for the re-development of the campus for mixed usage including "care facilities for the elderly" and new private housing.
- Planning permission was granted in 2017 and Audley (Retirement Village) and Royalton (High-end private housing) entered the game.

**10 year gap**

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# The gap years - 1

- 26<sup>th</sup> Jul 2012: "A GROUP of activists is living in woodland near one of the most historically significant spots in Surrey, to promote a life 'outside the system'.

The Diggers 2012 group has so far resisted three attempts to be thrown off the private land, part of the disused Brunel University campus on Cooper's Hill, Englefield Green, by owners Orchid Runnymede." [SurreyLive](#)

- Eventually evicted in June 2015





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# The gap years - 2

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- A TV / Film set



**Downton Abbey 2011**







Midsomer Murders 2013

# Sport at Cooper's Hill



Rowing: The Egham museum has trophy cups relating to the RIEC Boat Club (this one 1887)



Rugby: In the 1870s, the RIEC's rugby union team, referred to by its opponents as "Cooper's Hill", was one of the most prominent rugby clubs in England

Golf: There was a golf course at Cooper's Hill in the 1890s. Some tee markers can still be found in the grounds.





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# Sport at Cooper's Hill today

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# Sport at Cooper's Hill

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# The Chapel

2019 / DECEMBER 2021

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Page 1.

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of *Corpus Hill* in the County of *Surrey* in the Year One thousand eight hundred and *eighty eight* *1888*

| When Baptized.               | Child's Christian Name.  | Parents' Names.                         |                  | Abode.                          | Quality, Trade, or Profession.  | By whom the Ceremony was performed.            |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
|                              |                          | Christian.                              | Surname.         |                                 |   |  |
| 1887<br>April 4              | Charles<br>Frederic      | Charles<br>Buckley<br>John<br>Harris    | Edith<br>M'Elwre | Egham                           | Assistant<br>Professor<br>at Royal<br>Naval College<br>Cobham<br>R.I.E.C. | T. P. P. 1887<br>A. A.<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C. |
| No. 1                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1890<br>June 2 <sup>d</sup>  | Mathew<br>Elizabeth      | Alfred<br>Wingfield<br>John             | Lodge            | Colpus Hill                     | Professor<br>at<br>Royal Indian<br>Engineers College<br>R.I.E.C.          | House Bandmaster<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C.       |
| No. 2                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1898<br>Nov 18 <sup>th</sup> | Marion                   | Frank<br>William<br>Marion              | Harbora          | Englefield Green                | Analyst<br>Chemist  | House Bandmaster<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C.       |
| No. 3                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1899<br>7th 11 <sup>th</sup> | Rina<br>Dorothy<br>Allen | George<br>Agnes                         | George           | Colpus Hill                     | Cookman<br>Gardener   | House Bandmaster<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C.       |
| No. 4                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1899<br>Aug 26 <sup>th</sup> | Robert<br>Henry          | Charles<br>Buckley<br>John<br>Harris    | John<br>Harris   | Middle Hill<br>Englefield Green | Assistant<br>Professor<br>at Royal<br>Indian Engineers<br>College         | House<br>Bandmaster<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C.    |
| No. 5                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1900<br>May 15 <sup>th</sup> | Beatrice<br>Sarah        | George<br>Agnes                         | George           | Colpus Hill                     | Cookman<br>Bandmaster<br>Chaplain R.I.E.C.                                | House<br>Bandmaster<br>Chaplain R.I.E.C.       |
| No. 6                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1900<br>Sept 15              | Margaret<br>Beatrice     | Richard<br>John<br>Harris<br>Balthazar  | Levande          | Colpus Hill                     | Coal<br>Brazier<br>Offg. Permittance                                      | House<br>Bandmaster<br>Chaplain R.I.E.C.       |
| No. 7                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |
| 1901<br>March 31             | Priscilla<br>Victoria    | Frederic<br>Christoph<br>John<br>Harris | Mandy            | Colpus Hill<br>Penon            | Builder   | House<br>Bandmaster<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C.    |
| No. 8                        |                          |   |                  |                                 |   |  |

# REGISTER

OF

# BAPTISMS

Chapel  
IN THE PARISH OF  
The Royal Engineers College  
Corpus Hill  
IN THE COUNTY OF  
Surrey

Page 2.

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of *Corpus Hill* in the County of *Surrey* in the Year One thousand eight hundred and *four* *1884*

| When Baptized.                              | Child's Christian Name.  | Parents' Names.            |          | Abode.                                | Quality, Trade, or Profession. | By whom the Ceremony was performed.    |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
|   |                          | Christian.                 | Surname. |                                       |                                |  |
| 1884<br>February 28                         | John<br>Gilbert          | Frank<br>William<br>Marion | Harbord  | Surbiton House<br>Englefield<br>Green | Analyst<br>Chemist             | John Burroughs<br>Chaplain<br>R.I.E.C. |
| No. 9                                       |                          |                            |          |                                       |                                |  |
| 1884<br>April 3 <sup>rd</sup><br>Easter Day | Vera<br>Louise<br>Wilmet | Alfred<br>John<br>Pearson  | Mistons  | Nepe<br>Sea<br>Egham.                 | Solicitor                      | John Burroughs                         |
| No. 10                                      |                          |                            |          |                                       |                                |  |
| 18  |                          |                            |          |                                       |                                |  |

# The Chapel – Baptisms



2018











Cooper's Hill today





Thank You





