

HISTORY OF THE SPRINGHEAD PLEASURE GARDENS AND WATER-CRESS PLANTATION (c. 1805-1936)

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much has been written on the excavations of the Roman township at Springhead (1). There was no subsequent occupation of the site except for the north-west tip which, because of the clear springs and stream, was developed in 1805 for the growing of watercress. Later, the cress plantation included pleasure gardens as an added attraction.

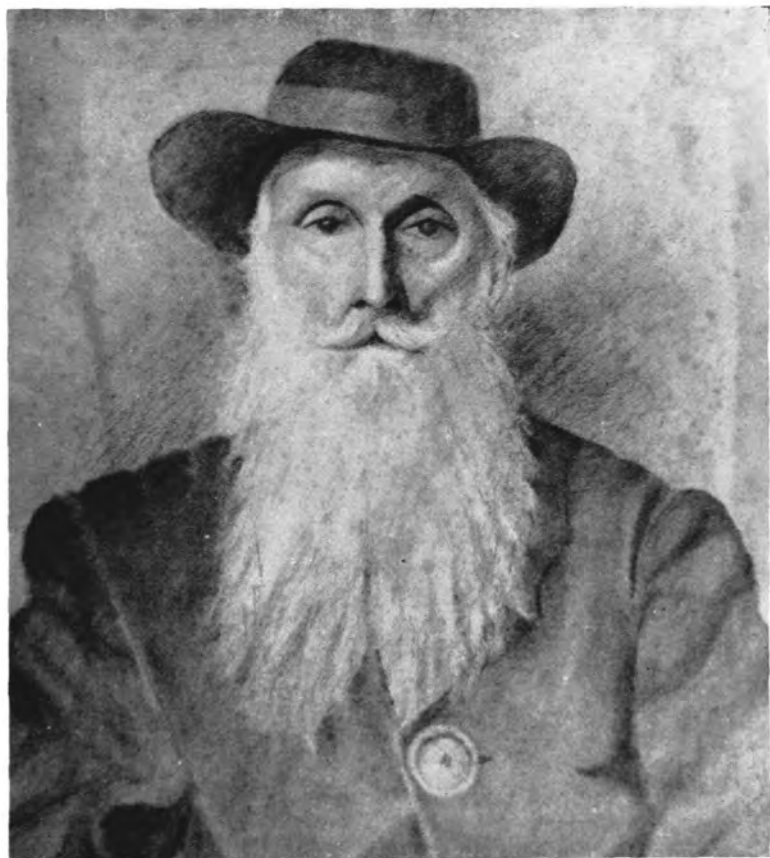
The history of the gardens is worth recording for three main reasons. In the first instance, the story is an interesting one in itself, primarily because of the most famous and somewhat eccentric proprietor, J. Silvester; second, the establishment was perhaps typical of the many pleasure gardens which sprang up during the Victorian era, Rosherville Gardens being another example in Gravesend and, third, the site of the gardens is closely associated with the Roman settlement in that it covered part of it and many antiquities were dug up in the grounds.

Most of the information is from primary sources. Up until 1849, notes and newspaper cuttings were kept by Dunkin, author of *Memoranda of Springhead*. These notes came to the author through Mr. Priest, one-time curator of the Dartford Museum and who died at an advanced age. The notes are previously unpublished and will eventually be deposited in the Gravesend Library, together with all other information mentioned below.

The Treadwell family farmed extensively in the area for about 300 years and Mr. H. Treadwell, who now lives in Northfleet, was born at Springhead in 1895 when his father was tenant of the gardens on the north side of the stream. I am indebted to him for a considerable amount of information for the period from c. 1880 until the present time.

Miss Silvester Henderson owns the original charcoal sketch of Henry Silvester (Plate I) and I am grateful to her for allowing me to examine and reproduce it in this article. P. Connolly was responsible for the photograph of the sketch and the present-day view of the area formerly occupied by the gardens (Plate III).

Finally, my thanks are due to Messrs. J. Benson, R. Hiscock and E. Tilley, my colleagues in the Gravesend Historical Society, for reading and criticizing the article in draft and also providing additional information. J. Benson remembers Henry Silvester quite well.



Henry Augustus Silvester (1827-1899).

PLATE II



View of the Gardens, looking north, c. 1908. (Note the man picking water-cress at the bottom left-hand corner and also the large (Treadwell) house. Compare with Plate III.)



View of the Gardens in 1966. (Note the derelict Treadwell house, and the remains of stream, now only fed by rainwater.)

TOPOGRAPHY

The location of the Springhead Gardens and the spring head (Roman harbour) is given on the Map of Springhead (1). The gardens were situated on the border of the parishes of Southfleet and Northfleet.

The so-called Springhead Road (the one about the middle of the nineteenth century, not the present Springhead Road which a century ago was known as Leather Bottel Lane) also known as the Old Coach Road (see Road M.8 on Map of Springhead) appears to have been part of the Roman Watling Street at its eastern extremity and perhaps a branch Roman road at the western end since it deviates from the now known course of the Watling Street. Actually, at the time of the tenancy of Silvester (1834-1849) it was known as the Old Roman Road (elsewhere the Watling Street) for the whole of its length to the gardens. At the time, the road was very important since it not only divided two parishes and two hundreds, but its centre was also the boundary line of two divisions of the county, presumably because of the fact that it was a Roman road.

The boundary was a considerable source of dispute at the time and is considered in detail later.

There are also a number of references to the situation of the gardens in Barkfields (see note on this field name in the Map of Springhead). Now Barkfields had an area of 118 a. 2 r. 10 p. (2) and was largely cultivated. The gardens only occupied the north-east tip of the field and this may explain why a Miss Pedder is rated for the 'Bark fields' at £72 per annum in 1804, Thos. Colyer for £56 in 1805 and Harris at £3 from 1819-1834 (3). The latter, presumably, was only occupying and renting the gardens themselves.

The Roman town at Springhead was abandoned during the first half of the fifth century and excavations have so far revealed that there was no subsequent occupation. Presumably the surrounding fields were eventually cultivated and, as the walls of the buildings in the town were removed and the foundations became partly or completely buried, the actual township itself came under the plough. There is reason to believe that the latter process started in or about the eighteenth century since Hasted (4) tells of the discovery of an alleged milestone in a position which must have been on the outskirts of the town. Some of the main buildings were robbed between 1800 and 1850 as can be determined from Dunkin's implication that foundations could be seen above the ground, and from the evidence of recent excavations when much Victorian pottery was found at the bottom of robber trenches.

The area around the head of the springs, which was such a vital place in the Roman period, suffered an equally dismal fate. The stream silted up and thus the water found some difficulty in escaping to the

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river. The area, which was already marshy in the Roman period, became a quagmire for which there is continuing evidence. Philipott (5) was in the area in 1619 and his publication in 1659 tells us of the conditions. At high spring tides the marshes were frequently overflowed 'as far as the high road' and 'would flow over that too and the rest of the valley southwards was it not for a high bank or causeway . . .'. Even this bank was overflowed at times and the whole valley flooded. The normal ebb and flow of the tide was stopped by gates.

The 'high road' may have been the Watling Street and the gates those to be seen in the engraving of c. 1839 (Fig. 1) but is more likely

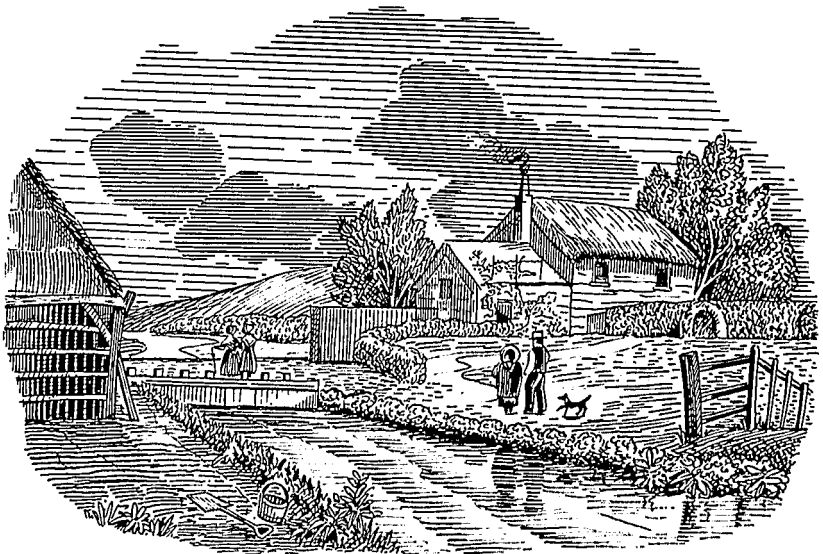


FIG. 1. View of the Gardens sometime before 1839.

to have been the present Stonebridge Road nearer the Thames, the area being subject to flooding until the 1920's.

We are also told that there was a tradition that anchors had been dug up at the southern extremity of these marshes (i.e. in the vicinity of the Roman harbour). This tradition should be treated with the greatest caution as mooring posts would almost certainly have been used in such shallow water. Hasted also makes reference to the flooding.

Mr. F. H. Hawkins, of Tonbridge, has been kind enough to point out what is the earliest known reference to the name 'Springhead', confirming the existence of water in the area at an earlier period. He refers to the *Kentish Traveller's Companion*, published in 1772 and enlarged in 1776; the following is an extract from the latter edition: 'In this lane which can be but a little out of the tract of the watling-

street is a small brook, called Spring-head. The prevailing notion . . . is that the tide from the Thames estuary flowed up to this spot.'

In or about the year 1800, we learn from Dunkin that the area was a swamp. We are also told that the stream in 1847 was fed by eight springs, seven of which rose in the parish of Southfleet and one in Northfleet, the former the property of Colyer and the latter of John Brenchley. Brenchley was a Gravesend distiller who married Rachel, daughter of 'Squire' Harman to whom the Wombwell Hall property passed from the Fortrye family through the Elliott's because of the lack of a male heir (6). The land on the Northfleet side was a gravelly-loamy soil and on the Southfleet side a soft peaty soil (3).

There can thus be little doubt that the site of Springhead was a swamp for centuries but that the springs continued to rise, probably from the pre-Roman era until they were stopped artificially in 1936 (see later).

It was just the sort of area in which to grow watercress.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE GARDENS

According to Dunkin (3), Thos. Colyer purchased the property (Springhead) in 1801 at which time it was a swamp. Since, however, Springhead was included in the Barkfields, he presumably leased the whole to Miss Pedder, including Court Lodge at £72 rent. Thorpe (7) tells us that a Mr. Pedder and 'one Lane who kept a public house (possibly the Colyers Arms) at Betsham' had great hoards of silver and copper coins. Pedder had farmed the land since at least 1788. The Lanes were an old Betsham family who lived at Betsham Villa, burnt down about 1953. The last member of the family who claimed to be the fifth generation to live at Betsham (a Mrs. Sarah E. Burt, *née* Lane) died in 1941. The adjoining cottages were known as Lanes Cottages (8).

In the year 1805, one Bradbury, an old gardener of Mr. Rafull of Swanscombe, was on the tramp looking for work during the harvest months. He passed Springhead and, presumably recognizing the potentialities, asked the owner of the land for permission to clear it and grow watercress in its bed. Permission was granted and at the end of the year he planted his first crop which, in the event, was very successful.

By 1807, Bradbury had progressed so much that he was in a position to pay rent first to Mr. Harman, the proprietor of the land on the east side (probably north of the stream) and second, to Colyer, the landlord of the property on the west (southern) side. It was on this side that he was alleged to have found coins, fibulæ and pottery 'which he readily sold at good prices (3), (9). This is certainly the correct side for finding antiquities so that the claims may well be true.

In the same year, whilst making a level and wider watercourse, he discovered an enormous quantity of horse shoes and clinkers 'did he hail the event with other gratulations than as a lucky godsend of old iron and he proceeded without delay to transmute the iron into gold by the alchemic aid of a neighbouring dealer in marine stores' (2).

In 1814, or perhaps earlier, he dug foundations for a hut and came upon a mass of brickwork and masonry. This he opened and thereby claims to have discovered the remains of a Roman bath (2). A cottage was erected over the site (perhaps the one in Fig. 1) and was certainly in existence in 1845 and perhaps in 1900 (see later).

Indifferent as he was to antiquities, Bradbury seems to have excelled at his job. When he started, the cress had a leaf 'barely the size of a shilling'. He improved this to such an extent that he was awarded a medal by the Society of Arts. He became known as 'Watercress Jack', retired in 1819 to Hertfordshire with a premium of £600 for the goodwill of the watercress beds and 'became the possessor of considerable landed property'.

He was succeeded by a Captain Harris who remained in occupation until 1834. Harris replaced the former cress by a celery leaf species and advanced the state of the gardens considerably. He, too, was able to retire with reasonable wealth. Apparently he was also indifferent to antiquities and sold all he found without trace.

ADVENT OF MR. J. SILVESTER

It is now that the gardens became most famous when J. Silvester, at 'an enormous premium' took over the gardens (1834). Edward Colyer (Thos. Colyer having died in 1839) owned the surrounding properties. It may be noted that the name Silvester is frequently spelt Sylvester in contemporary accounts, but an extant letter of Silvester, confirms the latter spelling.

Silvester began work on his property immediately and at once began to find coins and other objects. The subject of these discoveries is considered under a later heading. However, the new tenant began by selling what he found, but was later prevailed upon by Dunkin to stop this practice and build a museum. This he did, and it immediately became an added attraction for the gardens.

There is little doubt that Silvester developed the gardens extensively (Fig. 2). By 1844 he had nearly three quarters of a mile developed (10) perhaps covering four acres of cress. He also changed the cress 'into a bronze-coloured leaf, larger than a crown piece' (11).

At one period, he forwarded to the London market, three types of cress 'one termed the green cress (the original and common cress of our rivers and ponds), another the celery leaf cress and the third, the cast



FIG. 2. View of the Gardens, probably sometime between 1844-1890.

iron cress. The scientific name of the watercress is *Sisymbrium nasturtium*. It may be propagated by seeds, or by cuttings from the stem; as in the practice of Mr. Silvester. The root itself is biennial, drying off at the end of the second year, but as fresh fibres spring from each of the upper joints of the stem, it is a matter of no importance' (11).

The business was quite extensive. Two van loads of hampers were despatched to London every day during the summer and every other day during the winter (12).

The plant was grown in rows on a gravelly bottom, over which the few inches deep clear stream was constantly flowing. This treatment appears to have caused the cress to be fuller in the leaf, and shorter in the stalk, than if grown in deeper water or a more confined situation.

It seems that a space of water was kept entirely clear of cress and this was used for keeping trout which became accustomed to the sight of human beings. This was clearly another case of creating an attraction for visitors.

Silvester was quite a showman, as is instanced in a description by Dunkin.

'In 1845, Barque-fields and Sole-field were cultivated with wheat—whilst, as if to mock the skill of the agriculturists of the nineteenth century, in Mr. Silvester's garden were then growing sundry ears of far finer wheat—the produce of grains found in a vase hermetically sealed with asphaltum, deposited by the side of a sarcophagus in a tomb at Thebes!'

Silvester's efforts were quite successful. He claimed that over a hundred vehicles a day travelled to the gardens and that it was not uncommon to see 14-16 carriages there at one time.

Visitors came to Springhead from a wide area. The following is a contemporary account of what was probably a typical outing of the time (13).

*'Excursion to Vagniacæ
(Springhead)
August 20th, 1849*

The party left Blackwall at 1.00 p.m. and arrived at Greenhithe at 2.00 p.m. They then walked to Swanscombe Church through the woods and across the cornfields to Springhead. There they were received by Mr. Silvester and family with much kindness, and wine, cooled in the fountains and rivulets, was served and afterwards tea and congenial accompaniments.

The objects which engaged the chief attention of the party consisted of the following additional acquisitions to the Springhead Museum.

- 150 coins from Vespasian to Honorius, some scarce.
- A handmill of granite.
- Two urns taken from nearby.
- Roman building just laid open.
- One beautiful figured specimen of the Upchurch ware.
- Personal ornaments etc.

Some antiquities of a very interesting nature were in the evening examined at Mr. Crafters museum, Gravesend and the party returned by rail having agreed to hold an evening archæological meeting at Gravesend after the next visit to Springhead.'

On 22nd August, 1844, Dunkin visited Springhead with his father, who was introduced to Silvester who then showed them his cabinet of antiquities which included over 400 Roman coins. It cannot have been long before that Dunkin met Silvester for the first time since it is about this time that he begins to record all the data relating to the gardens. On the same occasion, Silvester's son (whom we meet for the first time) accompanied the Dunkins to the place where the baths had been found some years before.

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In February 1845, Silvester sued the Southfleet and Northfleet parochial authorities to cause them to repair the Springhead Road leading to his property. The road was in a dangerous condition, thus deterring visitors to his site. This interesting story is related below. In 1845 there was also a boundary dispute over who owned which part of the property and this is also considered as a separate section.

On Tuesday night, the 30th March, 1847, one of Silvester's out-buildings was burnt down and the fire threatened the rest of the property. We learn this in a letter (13) from Silvester to Dunkin dated 19th April, 1847, when Silvester also tells us that he was laid up 'lame of foot'.

Silvester was fond of litigation. In August 1849 he sued the South-Eastern Railway Company to restrain them from opening their railway from London to Gravesend, until they had erected a bridge across the line in the parish of Northfleet and restored an ancient footway across the bridge (which had been diverted to a place some distance further along the line) leading from Northfleet Church to Springhead and Southfleet.

The trouble started in 1846 when the pathway was diverted on a 'temporary' basis by workmen. Silvester sought an assurance at the time that a bridge was to be put up but it did not appear during 1847 and 1848. In 1849, when the opening of the line was but a few days off, there was still no sign of the bridge and thus Silvester sought his injunction. Apparently Silvester's action produced the desired effect. From the point of view of the gardens, however, an affidavit from Silvester made the following points:

'... who stated the importance of the pathway being restored across the cutting, by a bridge, instead of being crossed on a level, inasmuch as at the place in question the line was carried at a sharp curve, so much so that persons crossing the level could not see a train approaching 200 yards off; the consequence of which would be that persons visiting Mr. Silvester's grounds would be deterred from so doing, by the danger of a train chancing to come along. It was stated by Mr. Silvester that having stationed a person to watch, on the previous Sunday, the number of persons coming along the footpath; it was found that it was upwards of 500, nine-tenths of whom were visitors to his grounds' (3), (14).

In December 1849, a sale was to be held at the Tivoli Tavern, Gravesend, when one Cooke, making preparations, happened to go to the garden, where he was horror-struck to find the body of a man sitting in an upright position in one of the alcoves. The deceased had destroyed himself 'by discharging a brace of pistols simultaneously, one on either side of the head'. The body was soon recognized as that of 'Mr. Silvester, the tenant of Springhead Gardens and formerly

belonging to Covent Garden Market, London. The body was placed in a shell and removed to the Old Union House, where an inquest was held the same evening. Verdict—Temporary Insanity' (3).

DISCOVERY OF ANTIQUITIES

It is only possible to guess at the vast amount of Roman material which was found in the nineteenth century and subsequently dispersed. It is possible that some of it has found its way into the Gravesend Museum which has received approximately 2,800 coins, only 800 of which have been found during excavations since World War II. The following is an indication of some of the finds made in the vicinity of the Springhead Gardens.

The only finds we know of made by Bradbury and Harris have already been indicated. As soon as Silvester took over 'he was surprised at the quantity of coins etc. his labourers were continually picking up' (2). Most of these early finds he gave away. Later—certainly by 1837, he was persuaded to keep them for which purpose he built a museum, probably more with an eye to business than anything else. Dunkin claims the credit for the idea of a museum.

A gold coin of Valentinian I was found in the gardens in 1837 (1). This coin was kept and displayed by Silvester. At the time, Springhead was within a sixpenny omnibus ride of Gravesend.

In the spring of 1884, 'some workmen whilst grubbing up the shrubs in the bank immediately above the now dried up springs . . . struck upon a foundation . . . picked up a beautifully executed piece of Samian ware . . . seized for his share of the spoil two silver coins . . .' Such actions by workmen have occurred even until the present day. It is interesting to note that the springs had dried up, although it can only have been for a very short time, perhaps during a period of drought.

During repairs made on the Northfleet side of the Springhead Road, a cinerary urn was found (29th April, 1845). A male skeleton was found in a bank above the road in June 1845. The legs had lain across the road and had thus been pulverized by the traffic, but the cranium and other bones were preserved in Silvester's museum (2).

During the summer of 1844, Silvester 'whilst engaged in recovering further portions of the bog . . . came upon heaps of fictile ware . . . bottoms of urns, amphoræ, Samian ware . . .' From this it was suggested that a pottery kiln lay in the vicinity, particularly since a nearby field was called 'Tiler's Field'. 'A perfect half of a quern was dug up on 16th May 1845' (11).

Perhaps the most important find of these prolific years 1844-45 was a British brass coin, described by Roach Smith who also catalogued the coins in the Springhead Museum (15). The obverse of the coin (con-

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cave) bore a horse and between the legs the letters CAC: the reverse (convex) a wheat ear dividing the letters CAM.

These are presumably the finds which were recorded. There must have been many others although it is curious that H. Treadwell who occupied the northern side of the property around 1900 found nothing. The present excavators have not yet investigated the area of the gardens, except on the fringe where the harbour and a few small finds were discovered.

THE SPRINGHEAD ROAD DISPUTE (3)

The flourishing state of the gardens under Silvester obviously required adequate means of access. That the 'old Roman Road'—the Springhead Road—was in a poor state of repair must have been most annoying to Silvester. It is not surprising, therefore, that on the 4th February of 1845, legal proceedings were commenced by him against the surveyors of Southfleet and Northfleet for not maintaining the road to the gardens in good repair.

It is in these early proceedings that we learn that the part of the road in question was 383 yards long ranging in width from 7 feet to 20 feet and at one spot, where it was only 8 feet wide, it was undercut 2 feet by a chalk pit. These facts, coupled with the large number of carriages using the road, seem to substantiate Silvester's claim.

Garland, one of the surveyors of Southfleet, admitted the danger but pointed out that the road was usually repaired by both Southfleet and Northfleet and that the road could not be widened on the Southfleet side. However, he promised to concur with the Northfleet surveyors and the action was adjourned until 15th March. The case came up on 29th March when the bench ordered the surveyors of both parishes to repair the road forthwith and, moreover, bound the present surveyors to ensure that their successors would carry out their instructions (it was time for new surveyors to be elected).

The case was again heard on Saturday, 14th April, since the surveyors had done nothing 'because they fancied their year of office would soon expire, and upon their successors would rest the onus of the undertaking'. The Rev. Murray, rector of the parish, would not 'let these do-nothing officers so lightly escape from their duties, and so they were unanimously re-elected'. There was then some discussion as to whether there were in fact any surveyors at that moment, but the magistrates ruled that there were. The magistrates finally ordered that a competent surveyor (Mr. Collis of Maidstone) should report upon the condition of the road.

The following week, 22nd April, Collis reported in court that the repairs could be effected within about a week at a cost of £72 16s. and the magistrates immediately ordered it to be done in three weeks.

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The defendants, the surveyors, were fined a nominal 1s. each at this hearing.

On 17th May, the case came up again, the 'surveyors treating the court with contempt' not bothering to turn up. They did appear eventually, however, one of them by the name of Cronk. Apparently the orders had still not been complied with and the only workmen who had been engaged 'were aged and impotent, and these they had the cruelty to reduce the wages' from 7s. 6d. to 6s. per week. The surveyors complained at this slur since the workmen were actually paid 6s. 6d.!

A fresh order to widen the road was made. At about this time a skeleton was found in the bank of the road and disposed of. A local paper commented 'The punishment for the violation of a Roman tomb was either a fine, or the loss of a hand, or banishment or death. It is fortunate both for the Southfleet and Northfleet surveyors that these penalties are not now inflicted.'

Very little had been done by early July and the Dartford bench 'deputed two of their body, the Rev. Mr. Renouard and Captain Dyke to inspect it. They reported it in an unsafe and horrible state, and the bench made a stringent order upon Southfleet parish to immediately amend their ways'. Northfleet parish agreed to comply and Brenchley, on the Northfleet side, was compelled to sell part of his land to enable the road to be widened.

After the visit, the magistrates appear to have been entertained by Silvester at the gardens. He 'exhibited to them certain of the strawberries for which these delightful gardens are celebrated. The fruit was duly criticised, and a verdict found that everybody ought to taste and judge for themselves'. We might well ask if this came under the heading of bribery and note yet another aspect of Silvester's activities.

The following conversation took place at Dartford Petty Sessions on 23rd August, 1845, Sir P. H. Dyke presiding.

Dyke—'Well, Mr. Russell what business have you for us today.'

Russell—'*Only the Springhead Road, Sir.*'

Dyke—'*Only the Springhead road. I thought that was settled and the road made good before this.*'

Russell—'No sir; it is just as you found it three months (!) ago—not a stone has been moved.'

Wells and Cronk, the surveyors were present. One reason claimed why they had done little was that the men were busy harvesting to which the magistrate replied 'they had not been harvesting ever since last February'. Another reason was that earth promised to them had not been provided to which the magistrate retorted that they did not consider this a suitable material for repairing roads. The surveyors were fined £5 each (11).

The road was no better (16) on 18th October and Dunkin provides no

further information on the subject. The road must have been repaired shortly afterwards, however, to judge by the number of carriages visiting the area and Silvester's acquiescence.

THE BOUNDARY DISPUTE (3)

In 1845, Silvester appears to have only been the tenant of the property. John Brenchley owned the Northfleet side and E. Colyer the Southfleet side and Brenchley claimed the whole of the stream bed and thus all the watercress. Colyer resisted the claim.

On 23rd May, a meeting was held on the spot to attempt to settle the dispute without litigation. Both Silvester and Dunkin were present and the 'aged Mr. Bradbury' was brought from Hertfordshire as a witness. However, by this time the appearance of the ground had changed so much that Bradbury and other witnesses could not agree on the boundary and no agreement was reached. After the proceedings had been completed 'a large party of gentlemen from the neighbouring parishes, upwards of 200, sat down to an *al fresco déjeuner à la fourchette*, in the garden, liberally provided by the worthy tenant of the properties'.

A compromise was eventually reached and in June 1845 (17) 'pursuant to notices affixed to the church doors of Southfleet and the neighbouring parishes of Northfleet and Swanscombe the inhabitants and authorities were invited to walk the bounds'. An irregular triangular stone, having upon its faces Northfleet, Swanscombe and Southfleet, was placed in the centre of the watercress stream to mark the junction of the parishes and over it was 'rigged a flaunting flag'. Texts from the Bible were read against removing neighbours' landmarks.

The proceedings which followed are best given as they were reported at the time.

'After the fixing of the stone, and the proper bumpings being duly performed, the hospitable occupant of Springhead spread out a first-rate luncheon at the water's edge, for the peripatetics to partake of ere they resumed their labours. Mirth and jollity were the orders of the day, till, in the exuberance of their spirits, it was thought advisable to ascertain the depth of the river, and, consequently, Mr. Mullender and another were plumped in.'

The parochial authorities now thought it time to get on with their perambulation and afterwards at about 5.00 p.m. nearly 100 men and boys sat down at 'The Ship' in Southfleet to a dinner.

'After the usual loyal toasts were given, and the churchwardens and officers of Southfleet, Edward Colyer, Esq., in a neat speech, returned thanks, as well as Mr. Lane, one of the overseers. To increase the hilarity, Mr. Silvester Junior had composed a song which was sung

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upon the occasion amidst the applause of all parties to the tune of "The Days when we went Gipsying".'

The boundary dispute appears to have arisen again in 1847 where a case 'Jones v. Colyer' was set down at Maidstone Assizes. Again, there was an 'al fresco' court and again Bradbury was called upon as a witness. After the court there was a fight for possession of the Southfleet parish map and 'it became a rich scene to see a solicitor, plaintiff and witnesses on both sides, all pitching with one another for such a bone of contention. The "Southfleeters" were victorious and deposited the map with Silvester until the next hearing.'

LATER HISTORY OF SOUTH SIDE

After the death of his father, Silvester Jr. (Henry Augustus) may have continued to manage the gardens on both sides of the stream although this is by no means certain. He soon appears, however, to have relaxed his efforts and apparently relinquished the north side in 1855.

The Northfleet Register records the marriage of Henry Augustus Silvester (25 yrs.), gardener, to Maria Chippenden, daughter of John Chippenden, cabinet maker, on 24th February, 1852. Also on 27th January, 1856, Kate, the daughter of Frederick and Susan Silvester, market gardener, was baptized (6). There were actually quite a number of Silvesters, but most of their descendants have emigrated to Australia.

There are a number of people in Gravesend and district who remember Silvester and describe him as a most impressive looking man with a great white flowing beard. This is confirmed by an extant charcoal sketch drawn (c. 1895) by Miss Archer, daughter of the architect who designed the Gravesend Clock Tower. He wore corded knee breeches and jacket which had 5s. pieces for buttons (Plate I).

James Benson remembers Silvester in the late 1890's, 'He drove a high trap, and had beside him his recently married young wife—a buxom young woman. He wore a brown velvet jacket, knee breeches and cloth leggings. As he drove, his white beard streamed back on both sides of his chin.' His second wife had been barmaid at the 'Elephant's Head' at Rosherville. They had a son Reginald and the north and south sides were thus re-united at times when Reginald and Henry Treadwell Jr. played together—but only when their mothers were on speaking terms!

Silvester was a Quaker and continued to occupy the south side of the stream until his death in 1899. He had only been cultivating a very small part of the stream at this time, which commenced at the house on the north side.

The property was rented after 1899 by Walter Elliott who was

succeeded by his son, Thomas Elliott (the elder son Walter was killed in World War I), and who still lives there. The tea-room was kept going, watercress was sold and there was also a small zoo as late as 1935-6. Even today there is a small café at the entrance to the gardens but T. Elliott is primarily a market gardener and nursery man. In the earlier period, the Elliotts had a fruiterers and greengrocers in High Street, Gravesend, on the east side.

LATER HISTORY OF NORTH SIDE (18)

A certain Arnold took over from Silvester Jr. in 1855. He appears to have managed the gardens much better but is chiefly known for his mother-in-law who died at the age of 104.

Arnold was succeeded by Bratton who later had a mineral water business in Bath Street, Gravesend. H. Treadwell Sr. (who farmed extensively in the area) took over in 1888, leasing the land from Colyer Ferguson of Wombwell Hall. He occupied the house on the site (now derelict) from 1890-1899 where Henry Treadwell Jr. was born, although the family at other times lived in a farmhouse on the adjoining Wingfield Bank (also called Winfield and Windfield). The house was let in 1899 to a Mr. Pepper, a timber merchant in Gravesend, and later to people named Phillpot.

The business prospered for a time under the Treadwells. Watercress was still grown and the family kept two gardeners and several men for cutting and bunching the cress, marketed in London and sold to visitors at twopence a bunch. Mrs. Treadwell ran a shop and tea-rooms. There were also swings and a large aviary of wild birds from owls to linnets. At this time, since the gardens were divided, both sides of the stream had tea-rooms and shops (Plate II).

Mr. Treadwell Jr. does not remember his father finding any Roman coins on the land, although he did find the bones of an 'enormous fish' when widening the stream. This situation is what would be expected since coins were normally found in Barkfields on the south side. Apparently the boundary stone was still *in situ* at this period and abreast the Treadwell's house.

There were some cottages about 20 yards from the entrance to the gardens facing the south side. These may have been the ones built over the 'Roman baths' since concrete was found in the vicinity, but they are no longer extant.

Another possibility is that the baths were located under the cottage which stood near the Old Watling Street until about 1950 when it was condemned and demolished. There is, however, much confusion over this. A cottage or cottages stood near the present railway bridge over Road M8 to the gardens. Another probably stood (foundations have

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been observed) about 20 yards south of the junction of M8 and R2 roads, beside and south of the Road M8.

The gardens suffered a severe blow in 1900 when the springs dried up and this is considered in the last section.

The north side was abandoned as gardens and is now farm land, growing potatoes! (Plate III).

THE END OF THE GARDENS

As mentioned, both sides were cultivating cress and had shops for a long period in the second half of the nineteenth century. The stream was divided into two abreast the house on the north side where, in 1900, the Elliott's part commenced, i.e. near the boundary stone.

There must have inevitably been rivalry between the two sides. One side (unknown) had a fortune-teller. 'The Old Original Peggy—No connection with the Other Side'. Business must have been good since she could afford half-a-crown a day for her pitch and a further three shillings for a cab morning and evening.

The two sides were connected at some period, certainly until the 1920's, by a plank bridge, supported by what was probably part of a Roman column, possibly the one kept in Maidstone Museum.

In 1886, the walk to Springhead from Gravesend was very pleasant but the seven or eight stiles made it difficult for the ladies with their long dresses. The walk is described as being most popular with loving couples. There was, as an alternative, a fleet of cabs, flies and carriages.

There were two ways to Springhead from Northfleet, one by the ascent of a wooden-tread stairway in the bank opposite the present cemetery across fields and then a steep descent to the gardens, or by descending to the stream at the back of Northfleet Church and taking the pathway alongside the stream. In wet weather the way was via Pepper Hill (6).

In the late 1800's, James Benson remembers walking to the gardens on Whit-Mondays and August Bank Holidays early in the morning with a wheelbarrow and bring back a huge load of watercress which was served with tea, bread and butter at 9d. each by cottages on the Rosherville (Gravesend) undershore.

The footpath from Gravesend to Springhead ran from the corner of Grange Road and is now between the backs of the houses in Pelham Road and Grange Road. It then followed Campbell Road and possibly part of Mayfield Road. There is still a short section remaining near the junction of Dover Road and Five Ash Road. It then ran along what is now Park Avenue, Northfleet, part of Colyer Road, across allotments to Hall Road and then by the back of Wingfield Bank to the gardens (8).

The digging of chalk pits for cement about 1900 appears to have lowered the water level and consequently the springs dried up. This was clearly disastrous for cress growing and Treadwell Sr. did his best to start the flow again. He installed a gas engine to pump water from a well, built a small reservoir and a windmill, but it was of little or no avail.

He also sued the cement company but lost the day. In addition, he asked Colyer Ferguson to reduce his rent, then standing at £300 because of loss of water but an allowance of only £25 per annum was made. Thus, the heyday of the gardens finished in yet another lawsuit.

Fortunately, the water returned in 1903, but only as a relative trickle. Cress was still grown, but on a very much smaller scale.

In 1911, although the gardens still provided an afternoon visit from the surrounding districts, it was 'not such a favourite haunt as formerly'.

The gardens really just lingered on after this, but cress was sold commercially until about 1930 and 'wild cress' still grew until the water finally dried up in 1936. A small zoo with monkeys, guinea-pigs and birds was kept until almost the end.

The most prosperous period of the gardens was undoubtedly in the Victorian era. The only visitors today, still quite numerous, are those collecting plants from the excellent nurseries, and holidaymakers rushing down to the coast and stopping for a break at the café. Since the café can now barely be seen from the main road, its business has been curtailed (by the widening of the A.2 at this point). If J. Silvester were alive today, he would undoubtedly sue the Ministry of Transport!

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