

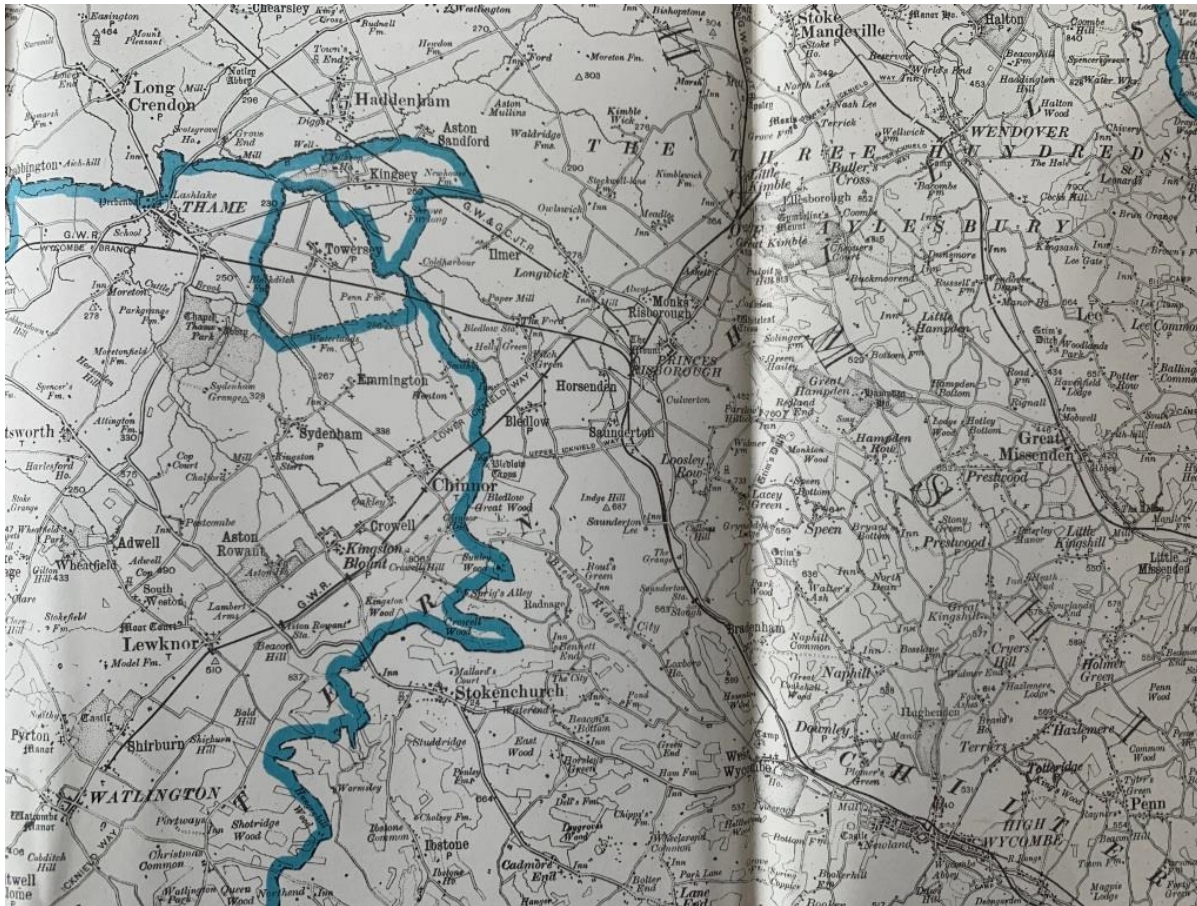
Graham Thomas

Hilda Cowham and Chinnor.

Posted on June 23, 2021 by The Author

The village of Chinnor is not one that usually features when it comes to listing places with artistic (in the broadest sense) associations. But the village and the neighbouring area have enjoyed a rich heritage in the early 20th century when it comes to attracting artists and authors.

Chinnor lies in the long shadow of the Chiltern scarp face, chalk hills that rises abruptly from the land, and in an area that has been long known as the Plain of Aylesbury. Once famous for its white ducks (and they were a favourite dish of Ian Fleming at the White Tower restaurant in London) the Vale was also a centre of the lace-making industry, chair-turning, apple orchards and arable agriculture. And while Chinnor lies in Oxfordshire, it has an air that is more Bucks than Oxon. The village is ancient and once the pre-Roman Icknield Way ran through it and there are faint traces of Iron Age habitation but nowadays that is well hidden by sometimes sprawling and unsympathetic modern development.



Map showing Chinnor and the surrounding area. (The Oxen-Bucks border is on blue.)

The area became attractive to artists in the early part of the 20th century for reasons that have never been described. Perhaps it was the beauty of the Chiltern beech woods and the flat simplicity of the Vale that opened up panoramic vistas of the sky. Perhaps it was because it was then easily reached from London by direct train or car, and likewise it was easy to visit the dreaming spires of Oxford. One such artist was Hilda Cowham (1873-1964), who had a holiday home in the village as described in the article a little way below. Cowham is possibly not a name that comes immediately to mind but in the early to mid 20th century she was a celebrated illustrator.



This year, next year, sometime, never.

A delightful postcard illustrated by Hilda Cowham.

One of her characters, a bush haired, black stockinged imp wearing a big red bow in her hair and infinitesimal petticoats, became famous and was nicknamed the Cowham child.



The Cowham Child, with doll.

In the period 1924 to 1935, she was employed by Shelley Potteries Ltd to provide illustrations for baby's plate and nursery ware, and then in the 1930s Cowham designed a number of posters for London Underground.

In 1900, Cowham had married Edgar Lander (1872-), also an artist. His father was a barrister's clerk but Edgar and two daughters

studied art. Immediately after their marriage the couple took an apartment in Joubert Mansions in Chelsea, and in the 1901 Census both are listed as artists. By the mid 1920s, Hilda Cowham and Edgar Lander were dividing their time between 92 Clifton Hill, St John's Wood, and Chinnor.

1890. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the parish of Chilton Chinnor in the County of Worcestershire

Cowham No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
267	7th March 1890	Edgar Lander	27	Bachelor	Artist	Spawton Washham	Henry Langley Lander	Barister Clerk
		Hilda Gertrude Cowham	26	Spinster		6 Jubilee Place	Joseph Cowham	Master B. Millner

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Anglican Church by Rev. H. Proham or after Banns by me, Henry Lander

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Edgar Lander in the Presence of us, W. Stanley Martin Hilda Gertrude Cowham Henry Lander

Marriage Certificate.

HOME CHAT August 17th, 1929.

IN THE SECOND ARTICLE OF THIS SERIES ON FAMOUS FOLKS' HOLIDAY HOMES, ALAN WARWICK DESCRIBES THE OLD-WORLD CHARM OF—

Hilda Cowham's COTTAGE

in the heart of rural England is situated the summer retreat of two artist lovers of the simple life—a cottage weathered in the ravages of a great soldier.

THE road that carries you from London Town to this cottage that Oliver Cromwell knew sweeps over the great green Chiltern Hills to Chinnor, with its thatched roofs and its ancient history. Facing the village shop stands the cottage with its tiny front garden, and its no garden at all at the back!

Very white is this cottage, its smooth mud walls gleaming in the sunshine, while the roof of thatch, two feet thick, rolls over it like a great eiderdown.

Up the garden path is a green cottage door that opens on a latch and bears on its face an antique brass knocker and the name Cromwell Cottage. When you pass the threshold—with head slightly bowed, for the door is not over high—you have entered into the country home of two distinguished artists, Miss Hilda Cowham and her husband, Mr. Edgar Lander.

Here these two spend the summer days with their pencils and pastels and brushes, and here they lead the cottage life. Hilda Cowham christened it Cromwell Cottage because of its historical associations. Cromwell and his troops once occupied Chinnor. "Old Nell" himself took up his quarters at a nearby inn, while his men were billeted in the restricted quarters of this cottage, which has precisely one living-room, a kitchen of exceeding smallness, and two diminutive bed-rooms at the top of a crooked flight of oak stairs.

The Only Frill!
TRULY this is a cottage in the best sense of the word, a cottage made for two such artists—a cottage without frills. At least, there is just one frill, though this must only be whispered! The cottage has electric light! A few weeks ago electricity came to the village, after three hundred years of lamps and candles!

The green front door opens directly into the living-room, and the two oak chairs thereon, black with age, that span the low white-washed ceiling, are liable to strike the heads of the tall and unwary!

There are two windows to this room. One is a big bay window that looks out on to the village street, and floods the room with light. The other window is no more than a foot square, and to-day it is graced with miniature curtains of chintz that match the curtain of the superior window and the chintz that fringes the chimney-piece over the big fireplace.

The reason for this tiny window is instantly evident. It is a peep-window through which an unexpected caller might be gratified before having the door opened to him. Rugs lie on the stained and polished wood floor. Two eighteenth century grandfathers chairs occupy the place of honour on either side of the open hearth, and though the cottage is principally used by Miss Cowham as a summer retreat, one can well imagine the comfort of those chairs when set before a blazing fire burning in the deep, brick-lined fireplace, with its hearth of red tiles.

There is brightness in the room, gleams of reflected light from the quaint pieces of china which are ranged on the antique dresser. Gleams of light from a polished copper warming-pan, dulled gleams from pewter, and deep reflections from two convex mirrors in round gilt frames.

(Continued on page 398.)




Home Chat. August 1929. A description of the country home of Hilda Cowham and her husband Edgar Lander. Cromwell Cottage in Chinnor dates back to the 17th century.



BABY NOTREME.

'Strangers admire this Virol child'

110A.
10100P v 35, Marfield Crescent,

Thornton Heath. 14.11.27.

When my baby was a few weeks old the doctor advised Virol. The result was wonderful. She is now 9 months old, and one could not wish for a bonnier child.

I seldom take her out without strangers in the street stopping to admire her. I certainly intend giving her Virol throughout childhood and shall advise all my friends to give some to their children."

(Signed) Frances Notreme.

For healthy, lasting development of body and brain give Virol. Virol contains the special substances needed during childhood and the school age. Virol makes healthy nerves, firm flesh and strong bones. Virol builds for life.

VIROL

In Jars, 1/3, 2/-, 3/9; Family Jar, 15/-

VIROL LTD., LONDON, W.5.

simple tonic might give you back your health and energy. (2) To reduce below the waist, lie flat on the floor with your knees drawn up and roll several times from side to side, pressing on the floor with all your weight. That is the finest reducing "roller," I can tell you about.—To "Dorothy Mary" (Southport).



Board Wages.

YES, you are entitled to board wages while on holiday in addition to your usual wages. Talk this over with your mistress. I am sure she will be quite reasonable about it.—To "Anxious One."

HILDA COWHAM'S COTTAGE.

(Continued from page 377.)

For the rest, there are pictures on the walls that are in keeping with the nature of the room—old Cruikshank prints, two fascinating Baxter prints, and a steel engraving of Hogarth. There is, too, a contemporary miniature wax bust of Napoleon that looks at a giglet one of an earlier military genius—Oliver Cromwell.

The Simple Life.

APART from the front door, there are three other doors to this room, all painted green and all hung on old-type hinges. One merely leads into a cupboard, the second to a kitchen that seems to be about as large as a matchbox, and the third to the staircase. Up the staircase one finds oneself in the bed-rooms that lie side by side beneath the thatched roof.

Cromwell Cottage has risen to electric light, but it has yet to rise to hot and cold water laid on. There is not even a pump, only a well that is giddily deep and lies immediately outside the bay window. A bucket on the end of a rope has to be employed, but who minds? It is so utterly in keeping with the simple life of the cottage.

MABS PAPER PATTERNS

shown in this number, all in 34, 36, 38, and 40 inch bust sizes only, and packed in special descriptive envelopes, can be obtained, price 1s. each, post free, from Mabs Pattern Department, HOME CHAT, 291a, Oxford Street London, W.1.

NOTE:

Australian readers can obtain Mabs Patterns, price 1s. 6d. each, post free, from Madame Rupert, 337, George Street Sydney.

South African readers can obtain Mabs Patterns, price 1s. 6d. each, post free, from Mabs Pattern Department, c/o "South African Woman's Weekly," P.O. Box 950, Durban, South Africa.

A continuation of the cottage's description.

The cottage was called Cromwell Cottage and was on the High Street.



CROMWELL COTTAGE,
CHINNOR,
OXON.

*Kind thoughts and good wishes
for Christmas and
the New Year*



M.A. Haye.

1940s illustration of the cottage. In fact it might be a wood engraving.

It is still there, little changed from the outside other than the thatched roof is now tiled, but today the house is numbered 50, High Street.

As mentioned earlier, what brought Hilda Cowham to Chinnor is unknown but it was neither a village nor area devoid of artistic and literary talent. The short story writer, AE Coppard lived in the village from 1922 but likely moved in 1924-25 to the Henley area. They may have overlapped for a year or two. The artist John Nash lived in nearby Meadle from 1921 to 1944 and it would be strange if they did not know each other; Clare Leighton lived in Monks Risborough from 1930 for ten years. In nearby Thame, the innkeeper John Fothergill kept the Spread Eagle from 1921 to 1931, and had many literary figures staying or dining such as Shaw, Wells and Waugh. The hotel's sign was designed and painted by Dora Carrington.

In a history of Chinnor written by the Women's Institute (WI) in 1929, it lists Coppard as one of the 'well known people who have resided or visited Chinnor.' [Unpublished, a copy can be found in Chinnor Library.] It goes on to list the writers J B Priestly, Sir Philip Gibbs, Peggy Webling, Mr & Mrs Nevingon (sic) (Miss Evelyn Sharpe) and Gerald Bullett. None of these lived in Chinnor and it seems a reasonable assumption that they are listed because they visited Coppard or Cowham – the connections between them are reasonably obvious, for example Priestly and Coppard were on the editorial board of the Golden Book Magazine (UK Edition.) Coppard wrote a review of one of Bullett's books, *The Street of the Eye* a collection of ten short stories. However, the WI history fails to mention Hilda Cowham.

We know that she and her husband were still living in Chinnor in 1937. (See below.)

Clark, Walter Charles, Hong Kong, China.
 Clarke, Captain Samuel Rendall Walmer, Singapore, Straits Settlements.
 Coster, Howard, London.
 Creswell, Harry Bulkeley, London.
 Crossland, John Redgwick, Glasgow.
 Dale, Major C. H., London.
 Dixie, Frederick Harker, Gerrards Cross, Bucks.
 Dorling, Captain Henry Taprell, D.S.O., R.N., Woking, Surrey.
 Dunn, Miss D. Brenda, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
 Eales, Joseph Herbert, J.P., Perth, Western Australia.
 Evans, Frank Sydney, Purley, Surrey.
 Fuller-Maitland, Mrs. Ella Sophia Mary, Sidmouth, Devon.
 Glynn-Williams, Thomas Bulkeley, Esher, Surrey.
 Greenland, Sidney Frederick, London.
 Halliday, William Wilson, Sanderstead, Surrey.
 Hargrave, John Gordon, Kings Langley, Herts.
 Hartley, Harry Sagar, Chingford, Essex.
 Higgs, Miss Mary Kingsland, M.A., London.
 Hill, P. Maurice, London.
 Hodge, Miss Jessie M. M., London.
 Hodgson, Mrs. Willoughby Agnes, London.
 Jenkinson, Ernest Arthur, B.Sc., A.R.C.S., Rochester, Kent.
 Jones, Ernest, M.D., London.
 Kemp, Brian Charles Lavers, M.A., Wellington College, Crowthorne,
 Berks.
 Kincaid, William Wallace, Niagara Falls, New York, U.S.A.
 Kirby, H. F., Southall, Middx.
 Lamsa, George M., New York City, U.S.A.
 Lander, Mrs. Hilda Cowham, Chinnor, Oxon.
 Leonard, Colonel Ibbotson, D.S.O., London, Ont., Canada.
 Lockett, Edwin James, West Wycombe, Bucks.
 Makin, William James, London.
 Malone, Thomas John, Dublin.
 Mander, Gerald Poynton, M.A., Wolverhampton.
 Micklethwait, Miss Frances Mary Gore, M.B.E., A.R.C.S., Chalfont
 St. Giles, Bucks.
 Morris, Richard Henry, B.Sc., Newtown, Montgomery.
 Nash, Miss Adrienne A., London.
 Nicholson, John, London.
 Payton, Richard Burton, London.
 Pearce, John Edward, M.C., Pinner, Middx.
 Pegrume, Sydney, Nairobi, Kenya Colony.
 Pettman, Frank William, Birchington, Kent.
 Pickles, Arthur, M.A., LL.B., B.Sc., Haileybury College, Hertford.
 Pinckard, George Henry, M.A., J.P., Sunningdale, Berks.
 Purvis, J. Milne, D.A., Dundee.
 Richardson, C. M., B.A., Iwerne Minster, Dorset.
 Riddell, George Low, Ph.D., London.
 Ryan, Frederick W., M.A., Monkstown, Co. Dublin.

Mrs Hilda Cowham (Lander).

Naming the cottage Cromwell, while quaint, was in error. Oliver Cromwell had never stayed in the village although his troops had been billeted there in June 1643, and perhaps this was one of the

houses they used. The troops suffered badly from a raid by Prince Rupert's Cavalier troops, with over a hundred being taken prisoner and another fifty or so were killed. With that number of troops, and the village being small it is likely that most of the houses were taken over by the Parliamentarians.

By the end of the 1930s the family had left Chinnor and London, and were living in Single Oak Cottage, Wornesh Park, near Guildford.

V	do.	291	-						
Single Oak	do.	292	1	Lander Edgar	-	M	15 Nov 72	M	Artist
			2	Lander Hilda G.	-	F	29 July 73	M	Artist
Robin Hood Cottage	do.	293	1	Gage Herbert C.	-	M	19 Dec 82	M	Managing Director of Building Company
			2	Gage Margorie G.	-	F	16 Feb 05	M	Wife of Herbert Gage
3. BERRITTE	do.	294	1	CASSELL Cassell Mary	-	F	31 Jan 20	S	Housewife
do.	do.		2	Cassell Annie	-	F	19 Feb 04	M	Wife of Herbert Gage

1939 Census.

Edgar died first in 1958; Hilda Cowham died 29 September 1964 in Guildford leaving almost £50,000 in her will.