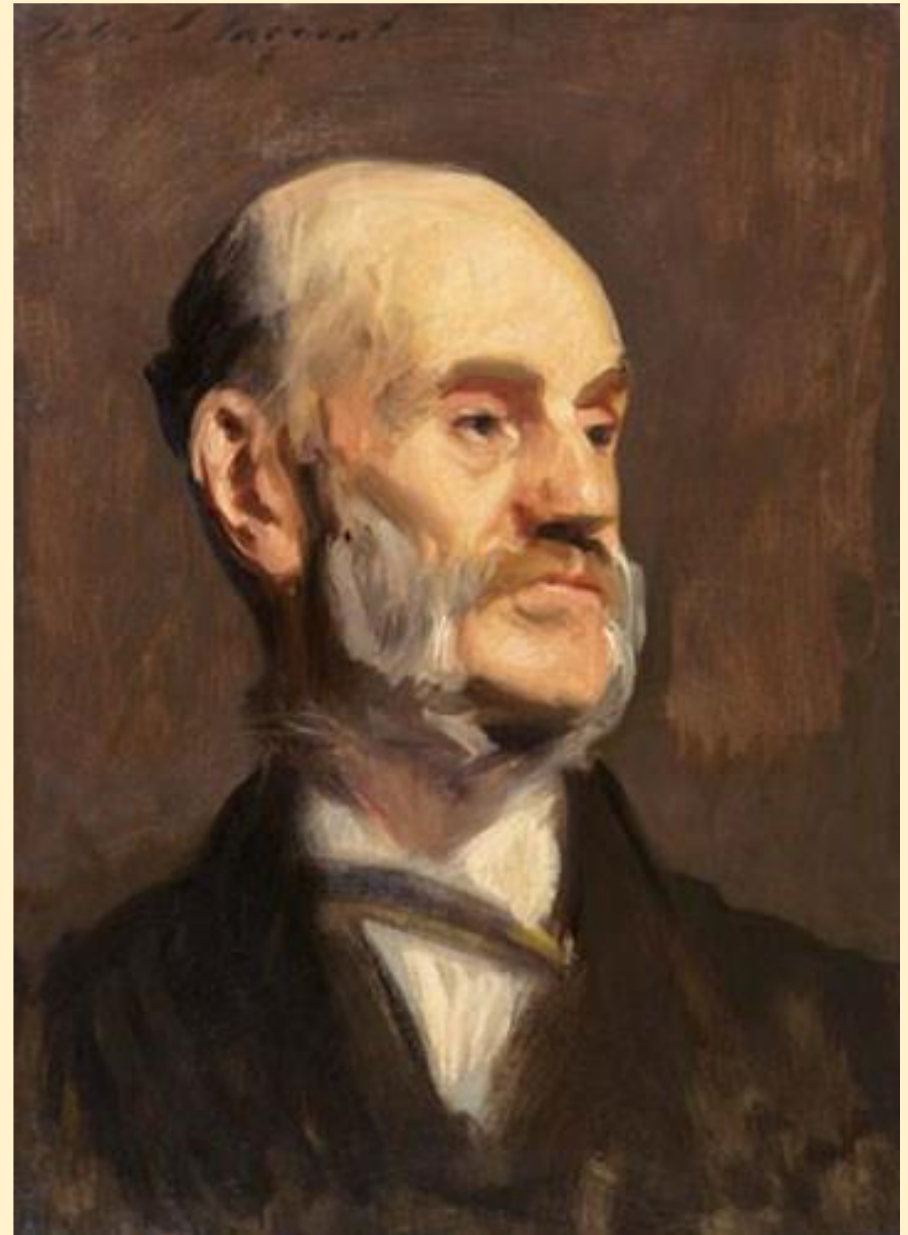


Hercules
Brabazon
Sharpe/
Brabazon,
1821-1906



Hercules Brabazon Sharpe was born in Paris on 27th November 1821 to parents Hercules Sharpe (died 1858) and Anne Mary Brabazon (died 1838).

Early in 1822, Hercules was baptised in the City of Paris. His father's family were from County Durham and his mother's Brabazon family from Ireland.

One of his siblings died in infancy and the others were William Sharpe born 1820 and Anne Sarah Sharpe born about 1823.

In 1832, Hercules's family moved into Oaklands Manor on the border of Westfield and Sedlecombe parishes which his father had had built on the site of the old "Hole Farm".

Oaklands Manor



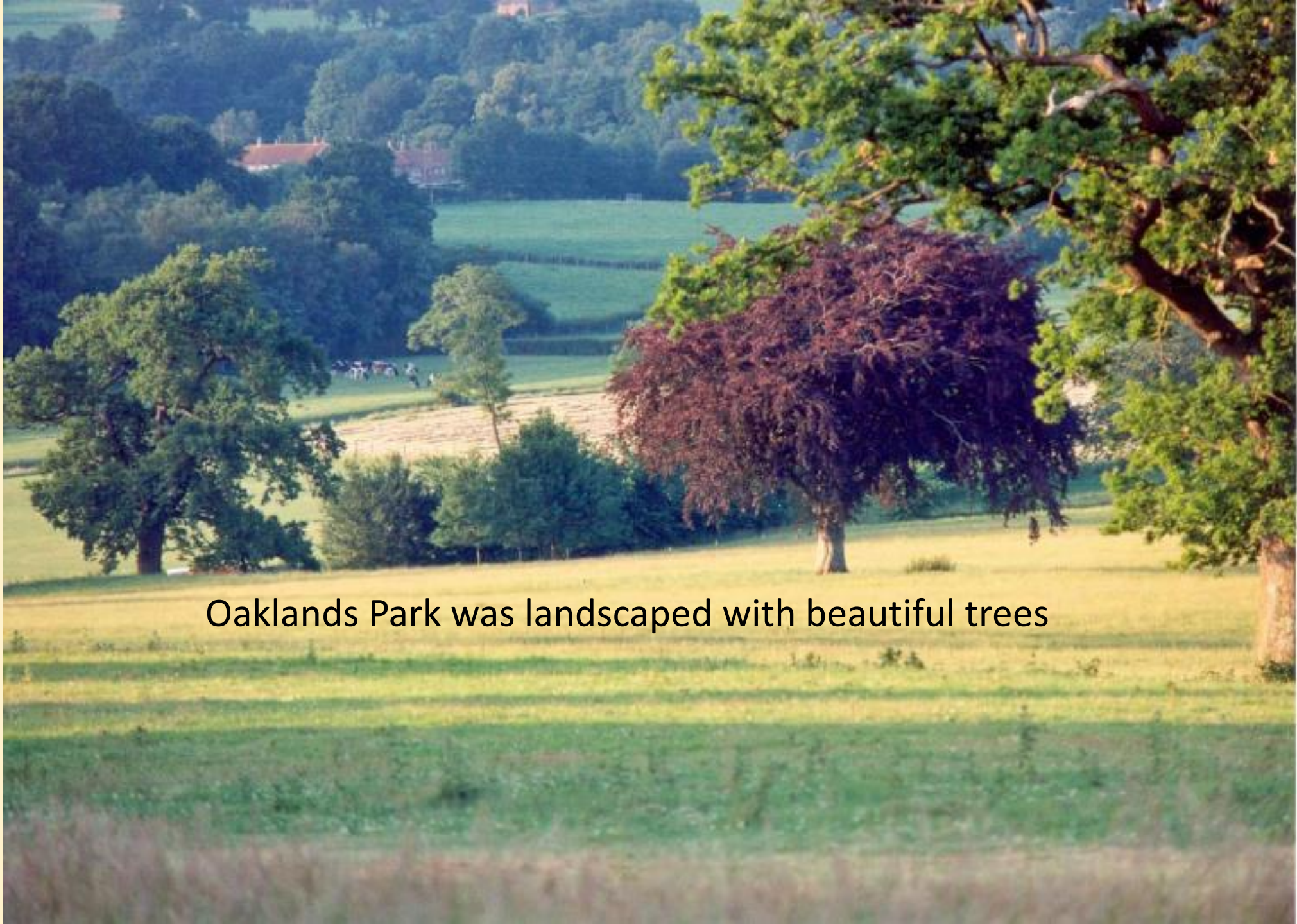
Oaklands Manor was a rambling Victorian house, on the edge of Sedlescombe Village designed by the famous architect Decimus Burton.

Sharpe/Brabazon/Combe Family home for 120 years

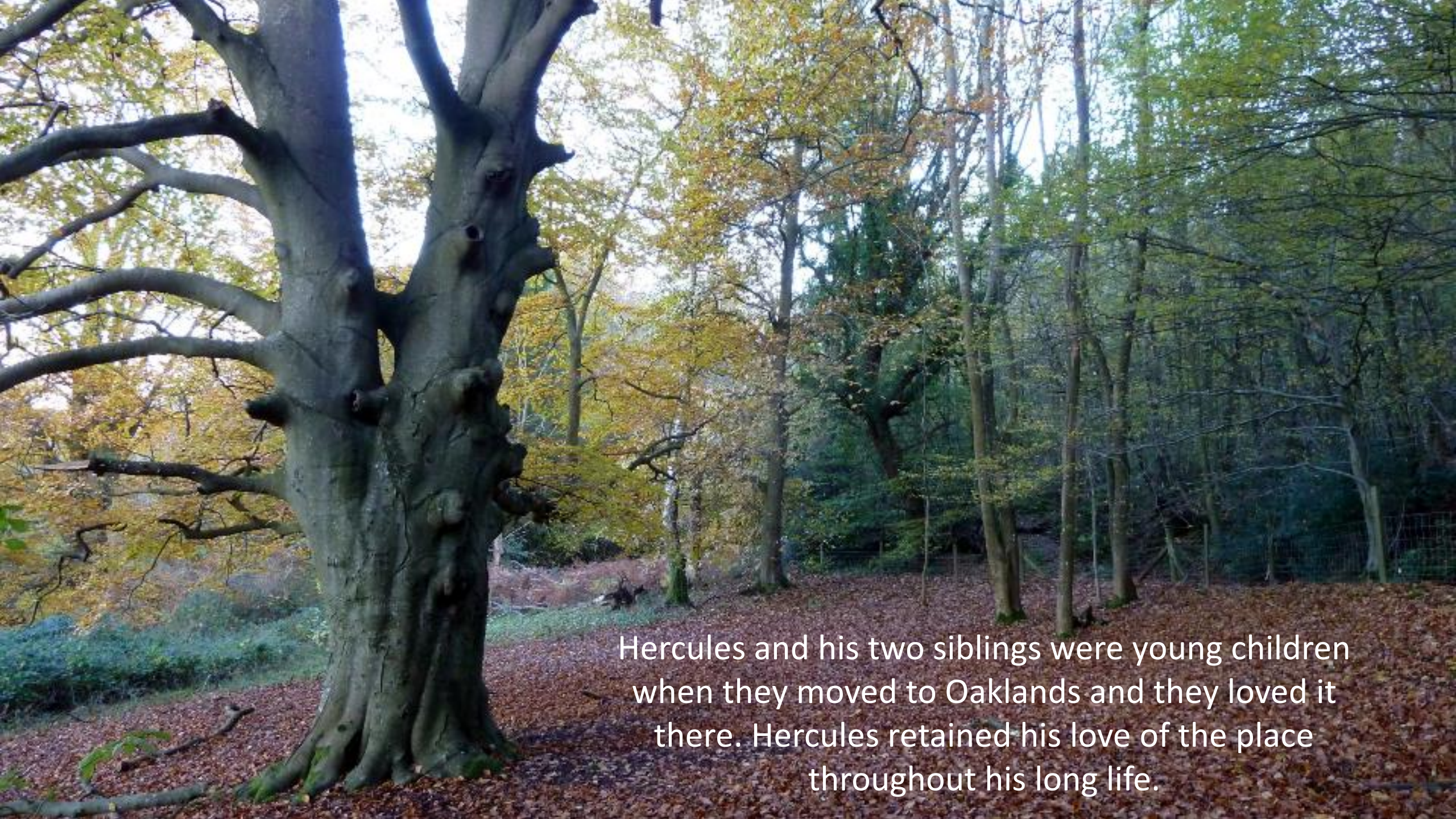
Decimus Burton, architect, designed Oaklands Manor.

Decimus also designed the arch at Hyde Park Corner as a memorial to the Duke of Wellington. It was designed to provide a grand entrance to London and originally was one of the gates in the gardens of Buckingham Palace.





Oaklands Park was landscaped with beautiful trees



Hercules and his two siblings were young children when they moved to Oaklands and they loved it there. Hercules retained his love of the place throughout his long life.



Was HBB remembering the old beech tree that he and his siblings used to play around on the Oaklands Park Estate in Sedlescombe, when he painted this later in life?

DEATH OF HERCULES' BROTHER WILLIAM AGED 26 AND HERCULES' INHERITANCE

In 1840, the eldest Sharpe son, William John Sharpe was only 20 when he inherited the Irish estate and Brabazon Park in County Mayo, Ireland from his childless uncle, Sir William Brabazon (1776-1840). Just six years later, William himself died in Malta, leaving all the Irish estate to his brother Hercules who had, not long before, graduated from Cambridge University with a BA and MA in mathematics. He had been to school at Harrow.

In order to inherit the estate, Hercules, as his brother had done, was required to change his surname from “Sharpe” to “Brabazon”. The name change seemed to have been quite usual in the Brabazon family maybe because, in the past, it helped illegitimate children to inherit the vast estates belonging to the wider Brabazon family. So, in 1847, Hercules agreed to the name change and became HERCULES BRABAZON BRABAZON, often shortened to HBB, that can be seen on the corner of his paintings.

Sir William's will also stipulated that the inheritor should spend at least six months of the year in residence at Brabazon Park in Ireland, or else forfeit the estate. This was, presumably, to ensure he was not one of the “absentee landlords” that were plaguing Ireland at that time.

SWINFORD TOWN

There is no doubt Hercules' mother would have told him how her Brabazon family had originated in Leicestershire and had been given land in Ireland (then under the control of the UK of Great Britain and Ireland) during the Cromwellian Settlement in the late 1700s. Land was handed over to English and Scottish Protestant supporters of the English monarch in the attempt to subdue Ireland and abolish Roman Catholicism in Britain. The town of Swinford was "a plantation town" where everything was built and owned by the Brabazons.



Market Street, Swinford



Brabazon Park House , Swinford, County Mayo (now demolished)

HERCULES DID NOT WANT TO LIVE IN IRELAND NOT EVEN FOR 6 MONTHS

Not wishing to reside in Ireland's cool and wet climate, Hercules employed lawyers to find a wangle so that he need not live in the Mansion House at Brabazon Park but still retain the estate. It is said that the lawyers argued over whether Hercules' uncle had meant "lunar months", or "a continuous period of 6 months", or "a carry over from one year to the next". We do not know how often he was in Brabazon Park but every 10 years for the censuses between 1861 and 1901, he was either in his London flat or at Oaklands Park in Sedlescombe.

MANAGEMENT OF THE IRISH ESTATE

Hercules inherited the Brabazon estate in Swinford, County Mayo at an extremely difficult time, right in the middle of the Great Famine that killed at least a million Irish with another million emigrating away from the agony of seeing so many of their friends, family and neighbours dying from hunger because of the failure of the potato crop. In that same year of 1847, known as “Black 47”, the workhouse in Swinford was overflowing with people who had been evicted from their homes. Typhus and dysentery broke out killing 600 people around the same time, all of whom were buried behind the workhouse in a mass grave. This grave is now treated as a tourist attraction!

The famine brought poverty to all people in Ireland. The poor tenants of the Brabazons could not pay their rents and the income expected by the landowners was severely reduced. Everywhere was despair.

As the famine ended, Irish landowners were desperate to get rid of their land and the tenants with it.

Hercules and his father and sister tried to auction off their land.

Then a few months later made a further attempt but this time moved the auction to Dublin where they thought there might be more money about.

Whereas there was despair in Ireland, for young Hercules life was relatively good. His fortune increased further in 1858, on his father's death, with the Co Durham and Sedlescombe estates passing to him also.

Despite having the lives of his tenants in his hands, he was most interested in meeting up with his Bohemian artistic group of friends than in managing estates. In Swinford, Ireland, there was an agent managing his land and very soon Hercules Sharpe/Brabazon's name can be seen in the petty sessions' records as the complainant against his tenants for minor transgressions such as trespassing on his land, letting a cow stray, collecting stones or cutting turf with fines imposed.

HBB's friendships spread far and wide, even to the court of the Spanish King. He also became a close friend of the pianist Liszt (1811-1886). It was Liszt who advised him on the purchase of a piano that was installed at Oaklands. He loved helping young musicians and was able to introduce one such young man to Liszt who helped his career.

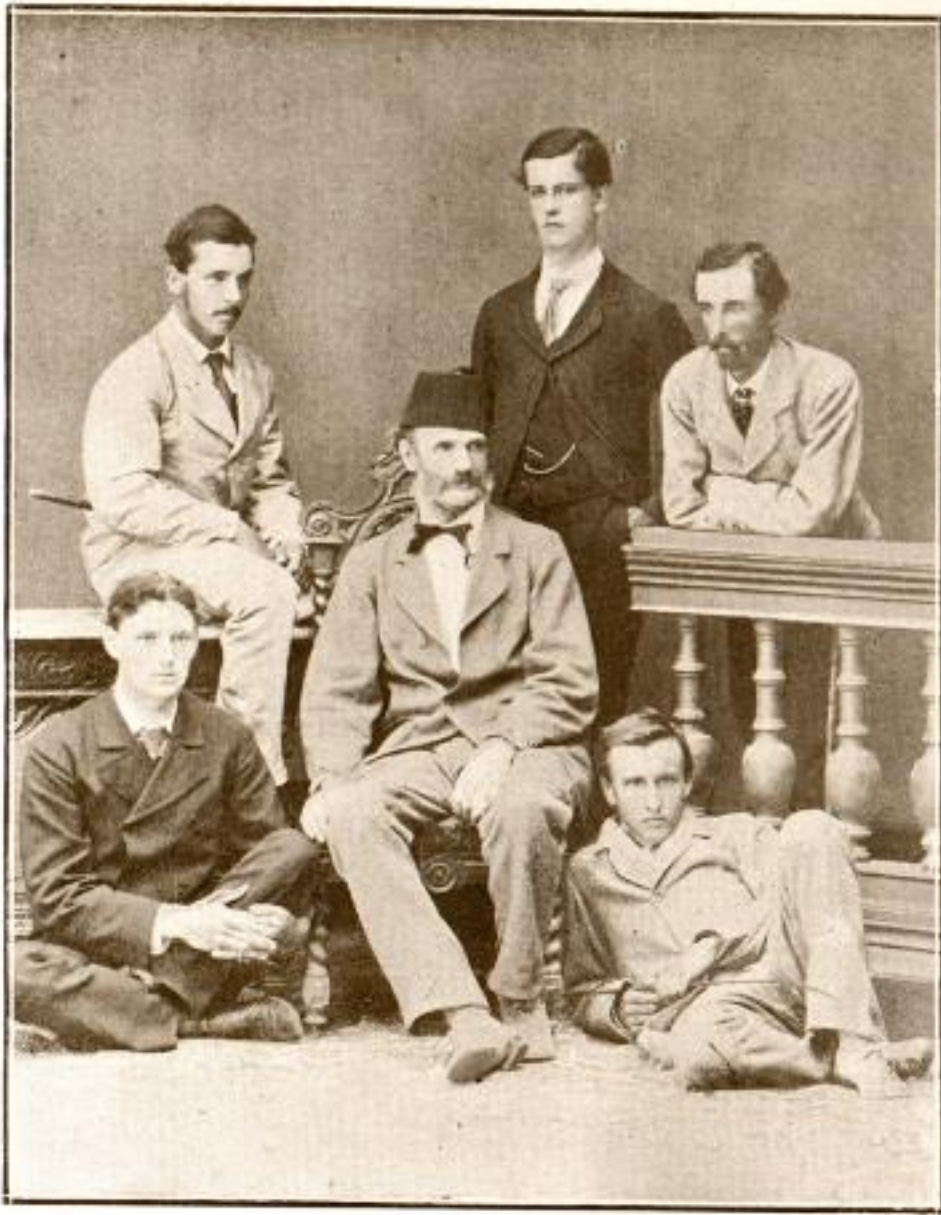
As well as travelling, often with friends, he
loved to spend time at Oaklands painting
including
“A Cottage in Sedlescombe”,

“A Stormy Sunset in Sussex”,

“View at Oaklands”



H.B.P.



H. T. B. COMBE, ESQ., AND HIS UNCLE,
H. B. BRABAZON, ESQ. (CAIRO, 1870).

HERCULES BRABAZON BRABAZON'S LIFESTYLE

His family wealth easily financed his peripatetic lifestyle. He was well-known for his early morning appearances at the front of the house, with a small leather case containing a few personal items and his precious watercolour paints, hailing a horse-drawn hansom cab with instructions, such as "*Cairo, my good man!*".

Whatever the foreign destination might be, he would simply be driven to Victoria Railway Station where he would catch a train/boat to France and all points south or east thereafter. Wherever he went, he sketched and painted every day in the style of Turner.

Tivoli in Italy





This painting by HBB called “Study of a Country House” so obviously depicts what we now know as “Manor Cottages” in Sedlescombe but was then called “The Old Manor”. This was the 15th century House (now Grade I listed), that one time belonged to him, that Hercules’ friend Rudyard Kipling wanted to buy at the turn of the 20th century.

The Old Manor House, Seddlescombe.



At Oaklands, his family grew roses and he loved to paint them.

It was not until he was over 70 that he had a one-man exhibition and overnight he became well-known in Victorian society. Several of his paintings are now on show in the Tate Gallery and in many other galleries across the world.



Royalty free painting

HBB was a friend of Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), an influential garden designer and writer. She was part of the popular Arts & Crafts Movement through her partnership with English architect Sir Edward Lutyens. She designed HBB's study at Oaklands.

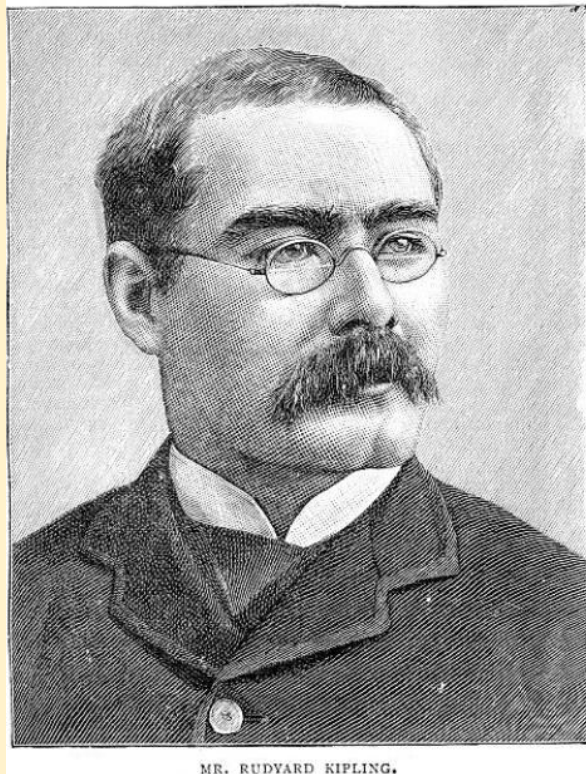


Lord Brassey



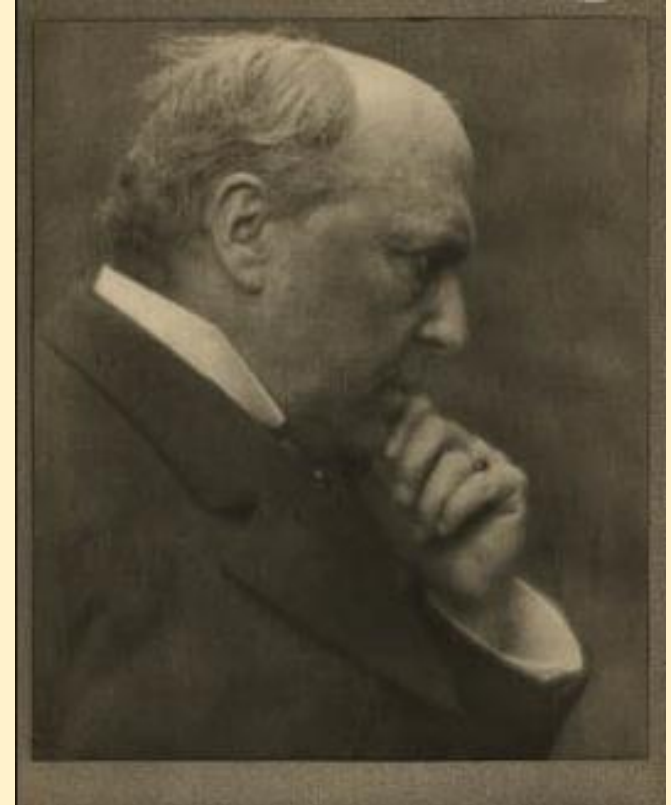
Brassey Institute designed by Lord Brassey and given to Hastings for use as a public library. Can be seen today

HERCULES' FRIENDS



Rudyard Kipling (later of Burwash) – writer

Getty image royalty free picture



Henry James of Rye - writer

HBB was very sociable and friendly with a range of well-off and well-known people in the area around Sedlescombe



Marianne North of Hastings was a friend of HBB. She was the daughter of Hastings MP, a botanist and painter and travelled the world on her own recording with paints the plants, flowers and scenes.

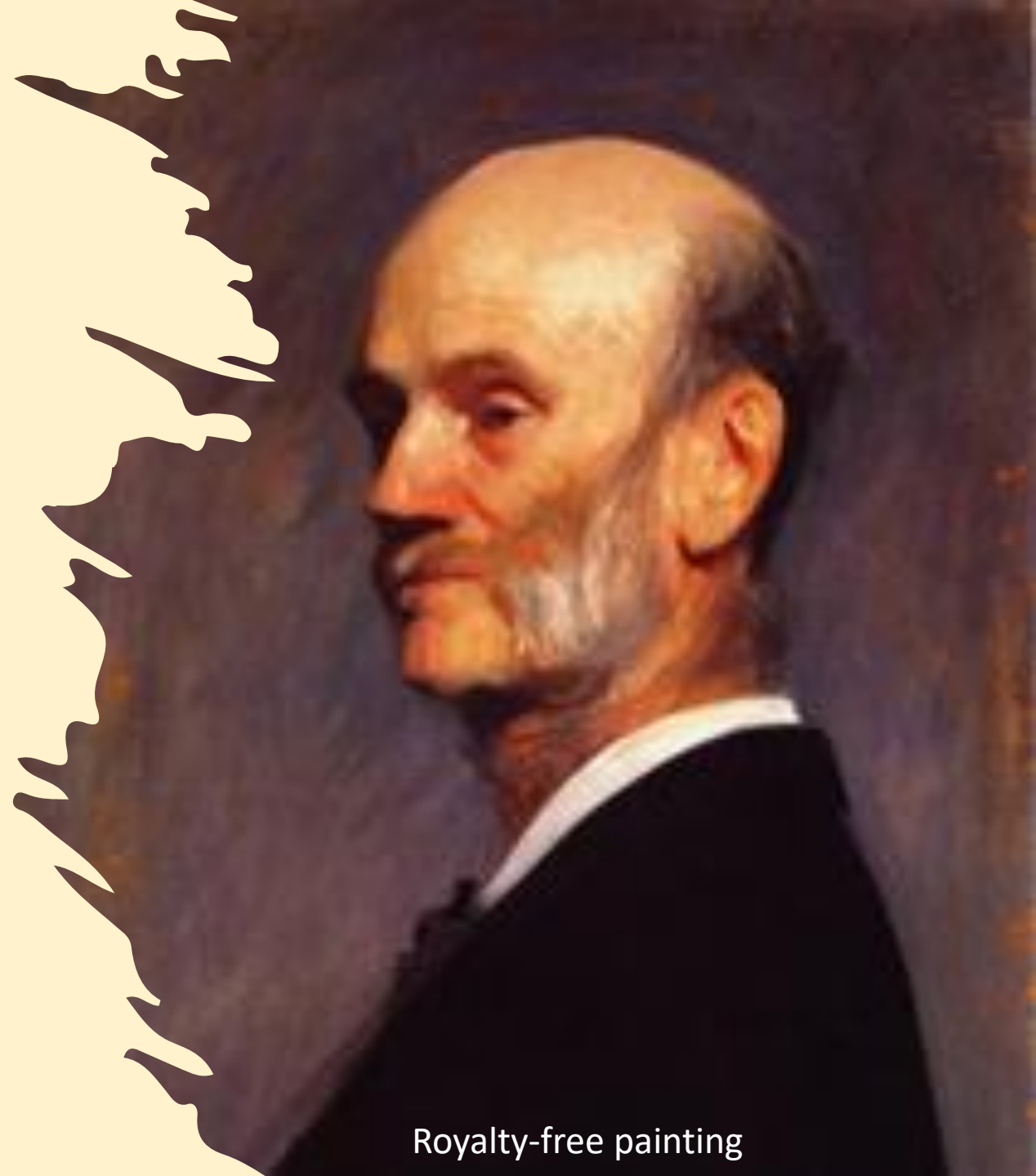
Her wonderful botanical paintings can be seen today at the Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens

www.kew.org/read-and-watch/marianne-north-botanical-artist

JOHN SINGER SARGENT 1856-1925

HBB was friendly with John Singer Sargent who painted anyone who was anyone in late Victorian times.

John Singer Sargent painted HBB several times and, twenty years later, kept one of these pictures in his personal collection.



Royalty-free painting

BACK IN IRELAND

In Ireland, tenants were still feeling hard done by with landowners imposing unacceptable restrictions on them and raising their rents. Starting in 1870, various Land Acts were introduced by the British Government. In that year, only 3% of Irish farmers owned their own land, leaving 97% as tenants and various people were determined to change those percentages.

HBB continued to take his tenants to court at the petty sessions. In 1869 it was for trespass onto his bog and causing damage to it.

BACK IN IRELAND

Matters moved forward and by the 1880s, it seemed that landowners, particularly absentee landlords like HBB, were feeling very vulnerable and the complaints to the petty sessions became very much more unpleasant. HBB went to the courts at least 36 times in 1885 with complaints against his tenants. For example:

“That on the 3rd day of July 1885 at Tullanacura in the County of Mayo, Defendant did wilfully trespass into and upon complainant’s house and refused to leave when warned to do so.”

Then in 1888, the following appeared in the Kirkintilloch Herald:

“The eviction took place near Swinford, Mayo, this week of an orphan girl named Catherine Kelly on the property of Mr. Hercules Brabazon of Sedlescombe, Hastings. It is alleged that 90 per cent of his tenants in Mayo and Roscommon have been evicted.”

BACK IN IRELAND

By 1889, there was a whole series of court cases brought by HBB's agent in County Mayo as follows:

“That Defendant did refuse to deliver up to complainant the owner thereof possession of part of the lands of Tullanacura with the dwelling house thereon situate in the Petty Sessions District of Swinford and County of Mayo into the possession of which he was put by permission of complainant the owner thereof as caretaker possessor of said Premises having been demanded by the known Agent of complainant. The defendant to show cause why an order should not be made to deliver up possession of same Premises.”

AT THE SAME TIME, IN SEDLESCOMBE, HBB WAS BUYING AND EXTENDING HOUSES



HBB's initials remain on properties in the village which he altered towards the end of the 19th century. This provided plenty of work for local men.





Asselton House dating from the 15th century had a large Victorian addition to the front. All this provided plenty of work for local people.

To the
— "Sedlescombe Parish Council"—
the gift of Hercules Brabazon Combe,
1894

Parish Council
MINUTE BOOK.

(Form No. 2.)



KNIGHT & CO., Local Government Publishers,

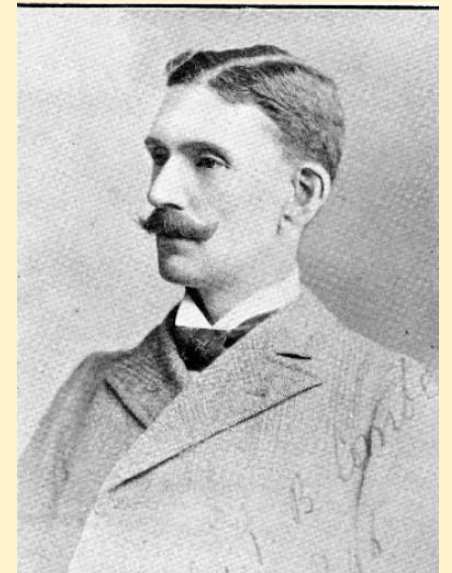
90 FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

(S 1969-94)

HBB was interested in what was happening in Sedlescombe.

When parish councils were set up in 1894, it was HBB who paid for and wrote his name inside the Sedlescombe Parish Council's first Minute Book.

In 1894, HBB's nephew, Harvey Trewythen Brabazon Combe, was elected the first Chairman of the Parish Council.



HBB NEVER GAVE UP TRAVELLING

Well into his seventies, HBB was still travelling. His name can be seen at the head of the passenger list for the Steamship Valetta in February 1898 as it set sail from London to Calcutta via Colombo (Ceylon, now Sri Lanka) where he was to disembark. We can imagine that his friend Rudyard Kipling had recommended the voyage as he himself had been on it, travelling on the same ship, for his honeymoon in 1892.

S.S. VALETTA was a passenger liner and also a cargo ship (recorded as carrying salt the previous year). It was the first P & O ship to be fitted with electric light, although in the First-Class Marble Saloons only.

HBB's death in 1906 was mourned by all the Village. The Sussex Express reported on his funeral saying that *"the esteem in which the deceased gentleman was held being evidenced by drawn blinds throughout the village, and the attendance at the church of many of the villagers and school children. The coffin was conveyed in a glass car, the bearers wearing white smock frocks, walking on either side. Carriages with the members of the family and many of the gentry of the district followed, and a body of the local tradesmen and tenants on the Oaklands Estate brought up the rear of the solemn procession."*

HARVEY TREWYTHEN BRABAZON COMBE, HBB's nephew mentioned on the previous page, TOOK OVER THE OAKLANDS ESTATE AS SQUIRE ON HBB's DEATH.

HBB's carefully catalogued large collection of his paintings was left to his nephew's wife – Amy Combe – to whom he had become very close in his later years. They would drive out together on sketching expeditions to Northiam, when he would relate stories of his schoolboy days, especially journeys with his brother William to his mother's home in the west of Ireland, taking four days by coach and sea (Amy Combe).

MEMORIALS TO HBB

Just a few months after HBB's death, Memorial Exhibitions of his paintings were held in a London Gallery and in Hastings.

AN OLDE WORLDE CURIOSITY SHOP was set up in The Tithe Barn in Sedlescombe, one of HBB's many Sedlescombe properties, in memory of HBB. In 1909, this was written in the Sedlescombe Parish Magazine:

“This modest little institution has in it possibilities of great things; it has been established by Mrs Harvey Combe in memory of the late H B Brabazon Esq., as a mart for the sale of old oak and iron work, and to encourage the almost lost art of real Sussex woodcarving and art embroidery. Excellent specimens of the latter are already on view made by the girl members of the guild. We would strongly urge the lads of the village to avail themselves of the opportunities that will be given of learning, under competent supervision, the art of real Sussex carving. May the scheme win all the success that it deserves.”

**TITHE BARN IN THE STREET, SEDLESCOMBE WHERE AMY COMBE SET
UP YE OLDE OAK AND IRON CURIOSITY SHOP IN MEMORY OF HBB**

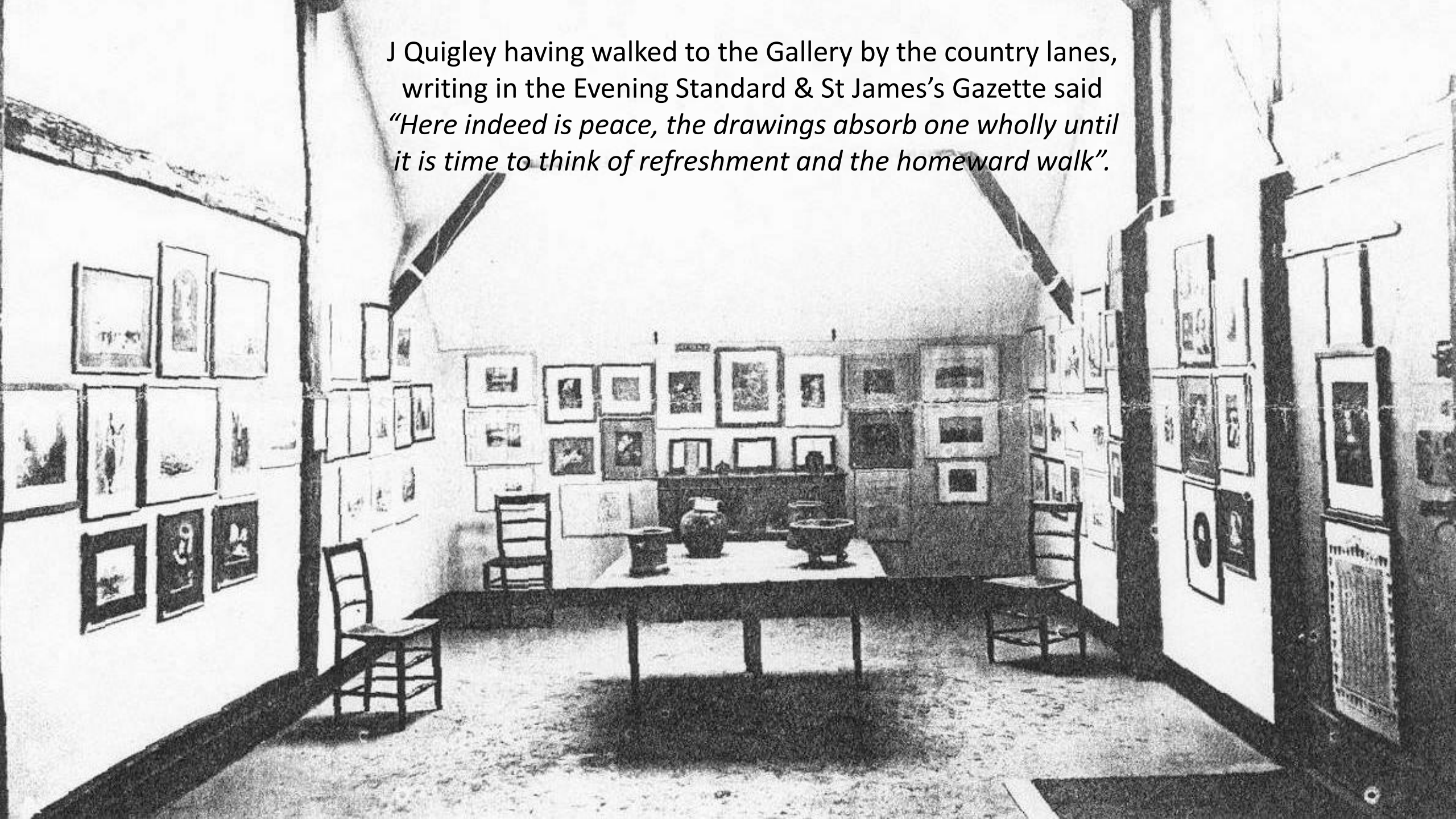


By 1910, the Olde World Curiosity Shop the Tithe Barn had been restored and turned into the Brabazon Art and Folk Museum by Amy Combe and the Hastings Museum where HBB had been Vice President for 15 years. The opening was carried out by HBB's old friend Lord Brassey and was attended by a huge gathering of people.

The Illustrated London News wrote that HBB was essentially a man of the heath, the hills, and the unrivalled horizon. The paintings on show were of places HBB had visited across the world but there was a special place for a group of Sussex landscapes which he loved so much. The catalogue included the words of a poem by his friend Rudyard Kipling:

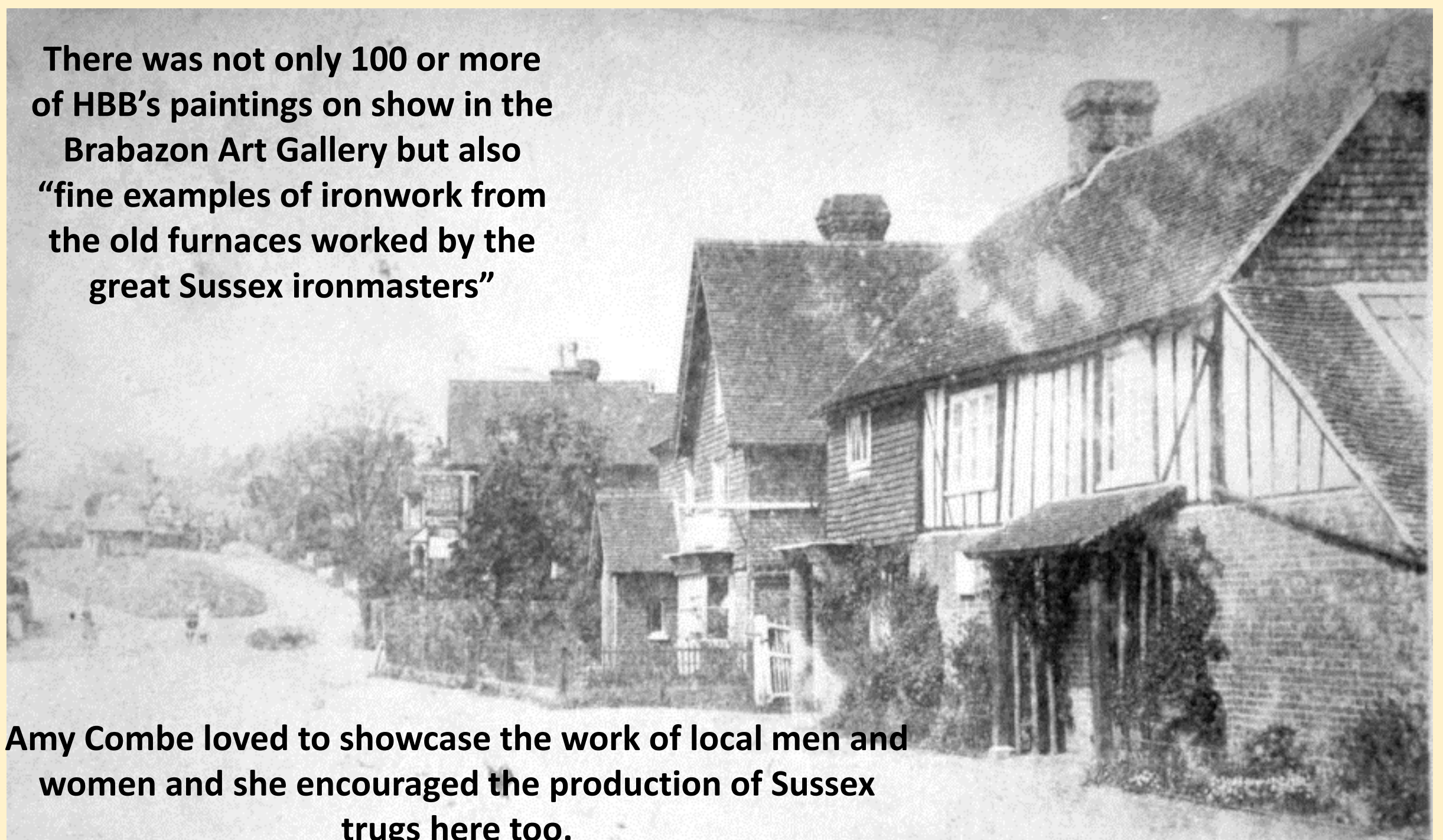
Each to his choice
And I rejoice the lot has fallen to me.
In a fair Land, a fair Land
In Sussex by the Sea.

J Quigley having walked to the Gallery by the country lanes,
writing in the Evening Standard & St James's Gazette said
*"Here indeed is peace, the drawings absorb one wholly until
it is time to think of refreshment and the homeward walk"*.

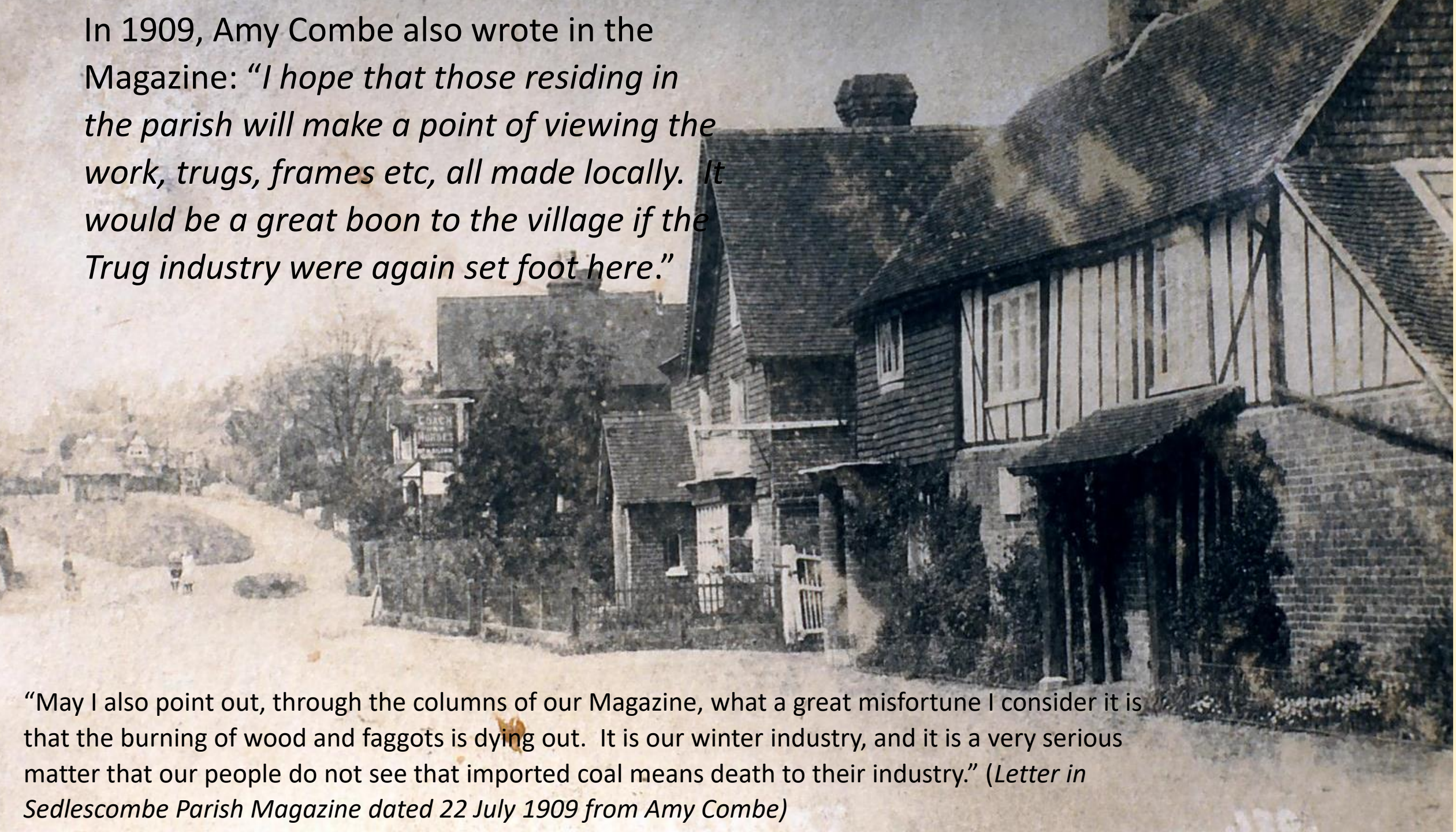


There was not only 100 or more of HBB's paintings on show in the Brabazon Art Gallery but also "fine examples of ironwork from the old furnaces worked by the great Sussex ironmasters"

Amy Combe loved to showcase the work of local men and women and she encouraged the production of Sussex trugs here too.



In 1909, Amy Combe also wrote in the Magazine: *“I hope that those residing in the parish will make a point of viewing the work, trugs, frames etc, all made locally. It would be a great boon to the village if the Trug industry were again set foot here.”*



“May I also point out, through the columns of our Magazine, what a great misfortune I consider it is that the burning of wood and faggots is dying out. It is our winter industry, and it is a very serious matter that our people do not see that imported coal means death to their industry.” (Letter in Sedlescombe Parish Magazine dated 22 July 1909 from Amy Combe)

WAS THIS MAGNIFICENT FIREBACK INCLUDED IN THE DISPLAY OF OLD IRON AT THE TITHE BARN IN THE HBB GALLERY?



The fireback is still shown as belonging to Amy and Harvey Combe in the registration of the deeds of the Bridge Garage. It says they or other owners have the right to remove *“two old firebacks (formerly described as 4 old fire bricks) attached to the front wall of the buildings forming part of the said premises and which formerly were described as a Wheelwright’s and Blacksmith’s shop”*.

Amy Combe could have installed this fireback next to the blacksmith shop as a suitable symbol.

This picture also shows that the bricks used to build the shop were from wood-fired kilns and were probably made locally.

If you go down to the Bridge Garage workshops when they are closed and the big doors are shut, you will see this fireback on the wall dated 1636. It was made at Brede Furnace. Similar firebacks can be seen in Hastings Museum and other sites.



Just 4 years after the opening of the Brabazon Gallery, the country was at war.

Amy Combe was again at the forefront using the gallery as a workroom where village women met each week to make an assortment of bandages, pyjamas, hot water bottle covers as well as treasure bags for the men at the front.

HBB's
paintings
remained
on the
walls of
the Tithe
Barn
during the
Red Cross
Working
Parties



After the War, things were just not the same for the gentry throughout the Village. Financial problems loomed large, and the mid-twenties saw the splitting up of the Oaklands Estate with several large auctions of more than 50 lots.



Hurst House which was part of the Oaklands Estate

SAD SALE OF VERY MANY OF HBB'S PAINTINGS BY AMY COMBE BECAUSE OF THE SEVERE FINANCIAL SITUATION WITH THE BIG HOUSES AND ESTATES.

As the financial situation worsened, in desperation, Amy Combe felt forced to sell much of the collection of HBB's watercolours, pastels and pencil sketches. Three huge sales of 3,200 paintings were held within 27 months. The market was flooded, and the pictures sold at prices as low as £1 each in Bond Street galleries. This glut quickly had a disastrous effect on HBB's reputation as his work became worthless.

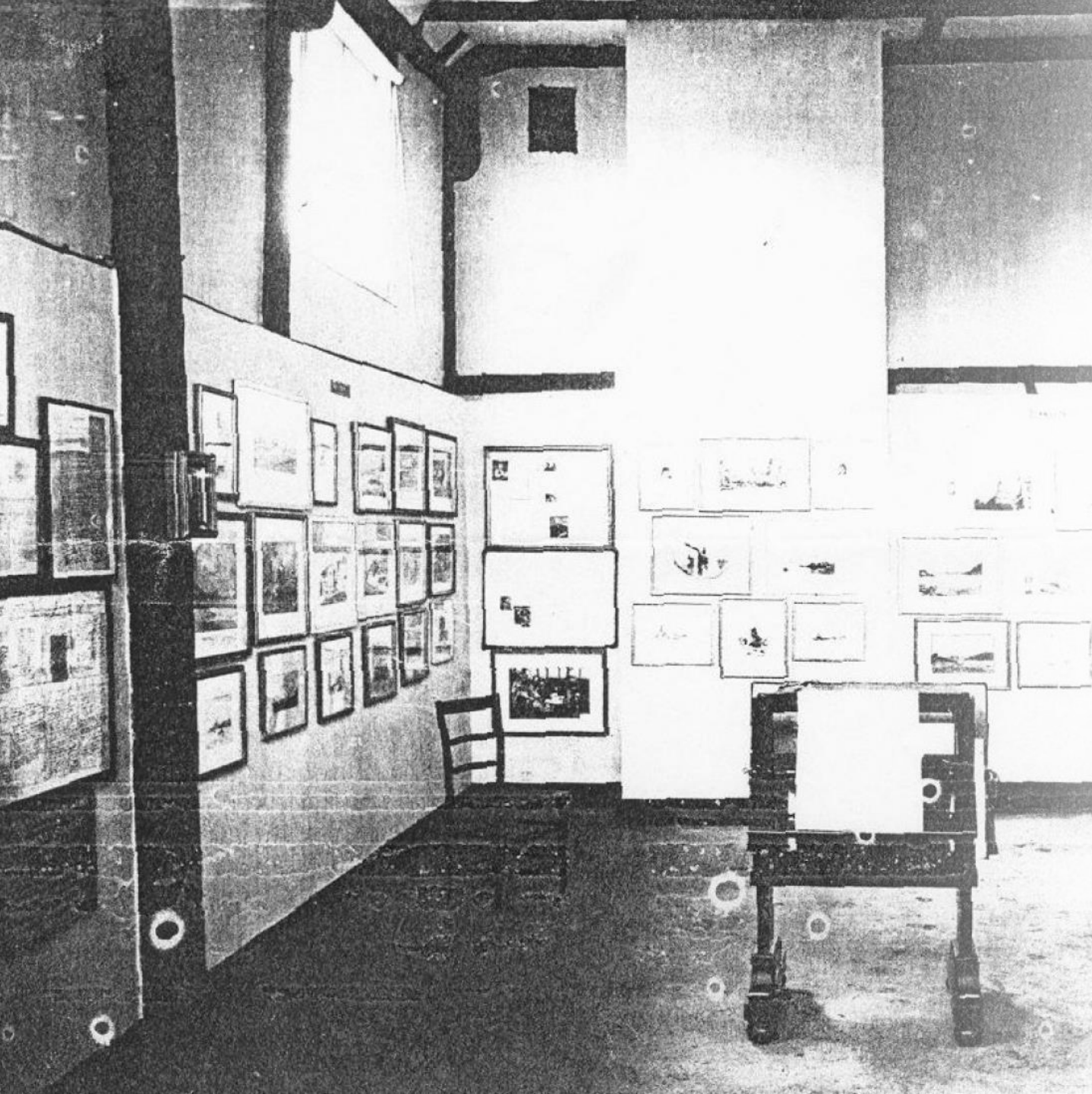


THE TITHE BARN

So, what happened to the Tithe Barn and its Brabazon Art Gallery that had been opened to such a fanfare in 1910? After WWI, it was used as a meeting place from time to time and continued to display HBB's paintings as well as the other items that were originally set up by Amy Combe. Then in 1930, the 89-year-old blind caretaker, William Boxall, died.

At that time, plans had been mooted to widen the road outside the Tithe Barn which would have meant demolishing the property. In November of that year, the Borough Engineer, Sidney Little was asked to report whether the Borough Council should pay for it to be "moved", lock, stock and barrel and re-erected in Hastings next to the Museum.

For us, today, the Report to the relevant committee of the Hastings Museum was useful in that it detailed not only the building but also the contents which were almost certainly the ones that had been chosen to display when the Brabazon Gallery was opened in 1909.



1930 CONTENTS OF THE TITHE BARN

The furniture was as follows:

- An oak cabinet containing some 17th century documents apparently relating to Ireland. {Presumably relating to HBB's Estate in Mayo}.
- Five oak chests, the best of these being a panelled oak chest with four panels on the front and lid, four feet one inch in length by two feet in width and two feet three inches in height. Two 16th century chests, sides, bottoms and lids each made out of one piece. A late 18th century oak box.
- An oak Queen Anne table (legs worm-eaten).
- An oak rush light holder on wooden three-legged stand (worm eaten).
- An oak cabinet with glazed top and front.
- Six wicker seat chairs.

THE TITHE BARN

The collection of about 25 pieces of ironwork was detailed as follows:

- One early fireback of the first period much worn.
- Two cast iron cheeks.
- Two or three iron firebacks, very late Dutch pattern.
- A large armorial fireback of 18th century having on a bend a rose between two boars' heads and on the shield two demi-lions and the hand of Ulster!
- Three pairs of iron dogs.
- Three mantraps!! (Maybe HBB used these to deter poachers in Sedlescombe)
- Some chimney cranes.
- Two or three pestles and mortars.

HBB Paintings:

- There were between ninety and one hundred of what was described as "colour pictures, examples of Brabazon's work".

THE TITHE BARN

THE DEPUTY BOROUGH ENGINEER, WHO CARRIED OUT THE THROUGH INSPECTION, REPORTED TO HIS BOSS AS FOLLOWS:

“While I do not feel competent to express an opinion with regard to the water colours, I do not think the collection would add to or enhance the interest of the Hastings Museum and I should not deem it of sufficient interest or importance to justify the acceptance of the building which would entail a large expenditure (£610) for removal, with a result which I feel would be unsatisfactory from all points of view.”



SO, THE TITHE BARN REMAINS THERE TODAY, NOT FAR OFF A HUNDRED YEARS LATER, PROVIDING A VALUABLE LINK WITH THE PAST

FINALLY – ON A DIFFERENT SUBJECT. Could it be?.....

Beryl Lucey, in her book “Twenty Centuries in Sedlescombe”, devotes a whole chapter to “*The Hidden Treasure*” describing how in 1876, HBB’s brother-in-law Boyce Combe reported that a labourer (probably one of the family’s employees) had found a large number of coins dating back 800 years to the time of Edward the Confessor in “Barber’s Field” close to The Street, Sedlescombe.

This hoard, an unusually large proportion of which was minted in Hastings, is thought to have been hidden when the Normans were attacking local people in Sedlescombe soon after the Battle of Hastings in the 11th century. Beryl writes that a lots of the coins went to local children before it was realised what had been found and then at the end: “*Of the coins, two or three can be seen in the Museum of the Battle Historical Society, two in the Hastings Museum and two in the Barbican Museum at Lewes; and that is the end of the fascinating little contact with a very enthralling chapter of early English History.*”

THE COINS

A search online, has unearthed an interesting British Numismatic Society account dating from 1961. It reads as follows:

“ A SMALL PARCEL OF PENNIES OF THE CONFESSOR FROM THE SEDLESCOMBE FIND

*“In the course of a recent visit to the Co. Limerick, I was shown by a private collector a little group of silver pennies of Edward the Confessor. They are believed all to have been purchased from Dublin and/or London dealers at the end of the nineteenth century, and, as we shall see, **there can be little doubt that the Sedlescombe hoard from Sussex (Inventory 327) is the source of almost all the coins in question. This great treasure, almost certainly part of the bullion reserve of the Hastings mint at the time of the Norman invasion, was widely dispersed at the time of finding, and has never been the subject of satisfactory publication.....**”* The report then goes on to describe the pennies that had reached Ireland.

Surely, it is not impossible that it was Hercules Brabazon Brabazon who was involved with considering what the coins were when originally found in Sedlescombe and it was he who took those amazing coins and sold them in Ireland on one of his occasional visits to his Irish Estate?

THE END

Further information about Hercules Sharpe/Brabazon can be found on various sites online. Please see [L01.pdf \(battlehistorysociety.com\)](#) for a description under the Heading of “Artists of the Battle District” and [O10.pdf \(battlehistorysociety.com\)](#) for “Oaklands and the Combe Family”.

**PART OF THE 2020 SEDLESCOMBE LOCAL HISTORY VIRTUAL EXHIBITION
COLLECTION (EXTENDED AFTER FURTHER RESEARCH).
ADDED TO BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY WEBSITE 2024**

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