



MR GEORGE HARPER

Born on 23rd July 1841, George Harper was the son of a dairy-man & farmer. His father had an extensive milk round and kept his cows on fields known as the Brooks in Ashford.

From when he was born until the late 1890s he lived in Castle Street, where he would later open a shop. He started work as a cabinet maker, then became an upholsterer which boosted his interest in furniture, art and antiques, of which he had a wide knowledge.

George Harper was proud of Ashford and worked hard for the town. He was one of the founder members of the Elwick Club and spent ten years as Chairman. He became a member of the Local Board in 1882 and continued to serve on the Urban District Council until 1900 when he resigned. However, he was re-elected and in 1907 followed Dr Wilks as Chairman.



Mr Harpers Antiques shop, pictured here, was at 8 -10 Castle Street and had an impressive list of customers including Lord Kitchener, Ellen Terry and the Duke of Edinburgh, who often visited the shop when staying at Eastwell Park.



MR HARPERS ASHFORD

In order to get an idea of what Ashford looked like during Mr Harpers lifetime, scan the QR code below or [click here](#) and use the slider to look at Ashford then, compared to Ashford today.

MR HARPERS LEGACY

As well as his contribution to Victoria Park, George Harper left a number of gifts to the town in his will. He left £1000, equivalent to approx. £118,500 today, in a scholarship fund for children living within five miles of St Mary's Church in the town centre to attend Ashford Grammar School. He also left a further £1,000 for establishing a library and for the purchase of new books which is quite possibly how our library was first established. Finally he left £500 to Ashford Cottage Hospital to establish a 'Harper Bed'

MR HARPER'S FOUNTAIN

THE STORY BEHIND THE HUBERT FOUNTAIN

FOUNTAIN HISTORY

The Hubert Fountain, described as a real art treasure, first appeared at the Royal Horticultural Society's Great Exhibition in 1862. It was one of two French cast iron fountains on display and painted to look like bronze.

After the 1862 Exhibition the Hubert Fountain was erected in the grounds of Olantigh Towers at Wye which was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1903. In 1910, during the rebuilding of Olantigh, the fountain was purchased by Mr. George Harper, an antique shop owner and art collector who was also at that time Chairman of the Ashford Urban District Council. He offered anonymously to present the fountain together with two huge cast iron stags to Ashford on condition that the Council moved it to Victoria Park at their own expense. The Council felt it was too expensive so Mr Harper agreed to pay to move it if the Council provided the foundations, water supply and would provide a water display every year on his birthday. The fountain was dismantled and brought to Ashford in sections by traction engine and on 24 July 1912 the fountain was formally presented to Ashford on a day filled with music and celebration. Mr Harper was unfortunately too poorly to attend and three weeks later he passed away.

The life-size cast iron stags which stood on the plinths at the bottom of the steps when the fountain was first installed in Victoria Park were removed at a later date.



DID YOU KNOW?

The Hubert Fountain has a 'sister' fountain who was made at the same time, for the same exhibition. This is the Ross Fountain and it now lives at the base of the castle in Edinburgh.

MOVING THE FOUNTAIN

Mr Harper eventually decided to pay for the removal of the fountain from Olantiagh House to Victoria Park himself, but what did that entail?



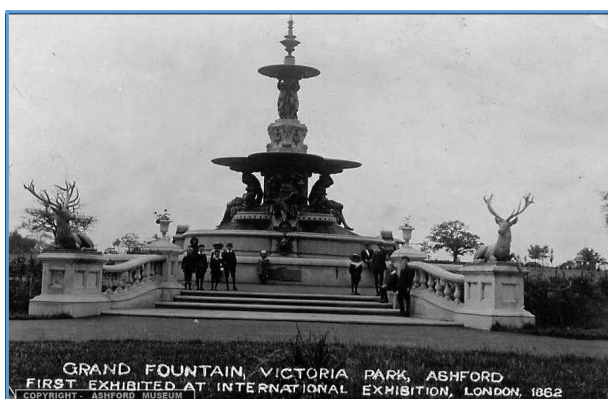
All 45 tonnes of the fountain had to be dismantled into pieces, then transported the journey from Wye to Victoria Park by traction engine!



ERECTING THE FOUNTAIN IN VICTORIA PARK, ASHFORD.



INSTALLING THE HUBERT FOUNTAIN



GRAND FOUNTAIN, VICTORIA PARK, ASHFORD
FIRST EXHIBITED AT INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION, LONDON, 1862
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DID YOU KNOW?

The Hubert Fountain was initially installed with two cast iron, life size stags sitting on plinths at the bottom of the steps!

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

- ◆ The upper four figures of children represent the four quarters of the earth, which we learn from the inscriptions of 'Europe', 'Asie', 'Amerique' and 'Afrique' on the medallions of the pedestal underneath them
- ◆ The lower four figures, two of which are male and two female, are entirely conventional human figures. They are accompanied by cupids and flowers
- ◆ The rest of the fountain has references to shields, masks, floral mouldings and architectural mouldings
- ◆ The fountain originally had a set of 64 whistles attached that were activated by the water when it was running making it a 'musical fountain'



Opening celebrations for the fountain in Victoria Park on 24th July 1912



DID YOU KNOW?

The Hubert Fountain is currently described by Historic England as, 'the finest of only three examples of listed cast iron ornamental fountains in England, one of only three surviving listed ornamental fountains in the country displayed at C19 International exhibitions, and the only listed ornamental fountain in England cast by a French foundry.'



FOUNTAIN FACTS

- ⇒ Created for the Great International Exhibition, 1862, Royal Horticultural Gardens, Kensington, London
- ⇒ Cast by the French foundry of M Barbezat and Co at the Val d'Osne Foundry in Haut Marne, near Paris
 - ⇒ Weight is approx. 45 tons
 - ⇒ Height is 33 foot and 6 inches