

A summer stroll through our churchyard at St Mary's triggers a somewhat maudlin moment of reflection especially on the transient nature of life and the fulfilled lives that lie within. Two graves draw my attention. Those of Lieutenant Colonel Jonkheer Reinoud Johannes Rutgers Van Rozenberg (1862 -1933) and Dr John Brian Christopherson (1868-1955). The two things they have in common are that they both lived for a time in the handsome Regency style house, just above our village at *Heaven's Gate*, a Grade II listed property.

This detached villa originally named *Rockwood* was built around 1815. The facade is mainly smooth rendered and has a typical Welsh slate low pitched hipped roof. Visually the front is smooth but overall the building is somewhat complex with various wings. Two storeys with five arched glazed windows. There are bar sashes over two 3 light bow windows and a central 6 panel part-glazed door plus two small arched lights under a fanlight. A 20th century glazed porch, and a 19th century verandah now with an asbestos-cement roof and carried on 5 decorative iron standards. At the first floor there are two small arched lights and one light as at front, all with brick arches. The interior retains original shutters but the plan and the general layout have been modified over the years.



Heaven's Gate Lodge Lane



Officers of the Korps Rijdende Artillerie

Although the property is interesting its previous occupants are perhaps more so. Jonkheer Rutgers Van Rozenberg was descended from a prominent Dutch aristocratic family. The family still exists and I have gleaned some information from the present family and his ex-regiment, the Korps Rijdende Artillerie (or Horse Artillery). Originally with the rank of captain he was commissioned to procure horses for the regiment from Ireland. He died in 1933 at *Heaven's Gate* at the age of 70 with no offspring and was apparently unmarried. He purchased an X-ray machine for the new Lydney Hospital. A fairly wealthy man who made several trips to Buenos Aires on business. A trust existed to maintain his grave but was dissolved in the 1970's. A photo of officers in his regiment appears above and who knows one might well be our Johannes! Why did he come to reside in the Forest - I have yet to ascertain.

The next occupant of *Heaven's Gate* was a Doctor John Christopherson. An eminent surgeon with extensive service in the Sudan. John Brian Christopherson (1868-1955) was one of the first doctors to be recruited to serve in the Sudan under the British colonial rule. During his work in Sudan (1902-1919) he was key in establishing the civilian medical services there, including establishing Khartoum Civil Hospital (opened in 1909). A photo (over) shows Dr Christopherson in Khartoum Civil Hospital in which he introduced for the first time a treatment for schistosomiasis*. To validate this treatment, he conducted a series of clinical trials and published his findings in leading medical journals. Several quotes below attest to his pre-eminence in this field.

'He will go down in medical history as the man who introduced the cure of bilharziasis (schistosomiasis) by intravenous injections of tartar emetic.'

P. Manson-Bahr about JB Christopherson

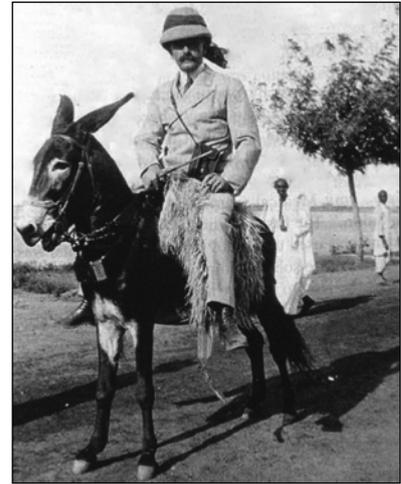
'This is probably the most significant contribution to medicine made by a member of the Sudan Medical Service.'

H.C. Squires on the first introduction of schistosomiasis chemotherapy in Sudan

* Schistosomiasis, also known as snail fever and bilharzia, is a disease caused by parasitic flatworms. The urinary tract or the intestines may be infected.



New Khartoum Civil Hospital opened in 1919. JBC with his staff.



JBC on a donkey

From records he thoroughly enjoyed his retirement in the Forest of Dean

‘ the nightjars making their churring noise at night, as I lay in bed before getting to sleep. The Forest of Dean is still a stronghold for nightjars but they are much rarer nowadays. These sounds still bring back memories. ’

John was married to Joyce Ormerod and brought back a grey parrot called Sebastian from the Sudan and also a Sudanese servant named Osman who helped in what was clearly a very happy household. By the mid 1930’s Christopherson welcomed his retirement. He lived the last twenty years as his obituary quaintly put it *‘to busy himself with horticultural and country pursuits’*. Members of the family evacuated to *Heaven’s Gate* during the last war recall *‘a happy summer in the surrounding countryside’*.

A stroll around the Forest in the area of this house rightly justifies its name *Heaven’s Gate*.



With Joyce’s cat, Timotheus