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Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society

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You will all have returned home with happy holiday memories. I think mine are these: The golden harvest gathering-in, wayside poppies, interesting village signs, driving through the flat country of the Fens with Ely Cathedral on the horizon and the soft accent of the Norfolk Folk. Last night in Wardsworth "I wandered lonely as a cloud" and how the golden daffodils and how the upward eye which surely return to us long after



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It seemed as if the Exhibition was written by exhibitors. If you were to visit you will perhaps gain a "flavour" of it from the following.

Frances Oxley

Yet another Summer is over and its time to commence our 1987/88 Society year. I do hope you all feel refreshed from your various holidays. My Sister and I took ours in East Anglia, centred at Swaffham in Norfolk. What a wealth of history there is in this delightful county. We have our own Lesnes Abbey, but the remains of the Cluniac Priory at Castle Acre are at once awesome and magnificent. The Priory was surrendered to Henry the Eighth at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. We can be thankful that he omitted Cathedrals from his hit list. So we still have Norwich, Ely and Peterborough Cathedrals in this area to muse on the talent and perseverance of their builders. I never cease to marvel when I enter these superb edifices how the craftsmen built them with the tools of their time. The glory and richness of the stained glass is always a delight and my own particular liking is for the exquisitely carved misericords used by the monks during long services.

You will all have returned home with happy holiday memories. I think mine are these: The golden harvest gathering-in, wayside poppies, interesting village signs, driving through the flat country of the Fens with Ely Cathedral on the horizon and the soft accent of the Norfolk Folk. Most of us learnt at school Wordsworth's poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud" when he describes his sight of a crowd of golden daffodils and how that further on he says "They flash upon the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude". Our holiday memories must surely return to us when we are feeling down and in particular during the long winter months.

Now to the highlight of the last Society year, the open evening at Lamorbey Park when we mounted an exhibition. We had on show, horse brasses, old farm tools, brass rubbings, Crystal Palace details, maps of our area at various times, scrapbook of Kentish Times local history cuttings, a photo album of the happenings of Royal Park Estate Community Association and the Hamlet of Halfway Street project. Our Chairman, Iris Morris, interested our visitors by asking them to calculate the age of a tree from the slice provided and also with much hilarity organised water divining tuition. It was a very happy evening for the Society and we felt that the time spent and effort made was worthwhile. We hoped that many of our visitors would keep their promise and join the Society in the Autumn. To our delight, Mr. Harry Ingram, our President was with us during the evening.

It seemed obvious that the theme of this newsletter should be the Exhibition at Lamorbey, June 1987. The following articles written by exhibitors reflect in some form their part in our successful evening. If you were unable to be present at our "show" you will perhaps gain a "flavour" of it from the following.

Frances Oxley

CRYSTAL PALACE

Our Crystal Palace display, shown during the Lamorbey open evening, consisted of the remarkable sale catalogue published by the auctioneers, Knight, Frank & Watley in 1911.

DOWSING

Dowsing has always been a secret occupation associated with magic and the occult. The Church condemned its practice saying that the movement of the rods was the work of the devil. As early as 1750 suggestions were being made that there might be a connection between divining and electricity and this view is still held by many today. Whatever the explanation it continues to be used as a method of finding water and many other buried substances.

"Dowsing is a gift given to a select group of people."

"Its use is restricted to the discovery of underground springs of water."

"Hazel twigs only can be used."

Do you agree with any of these statements?

In his book Discovering Dowsing and Divining (Shire Publications) Peter Naylor refutes all these assumptions.

During the last five or six years that I have been water divining I have found just a handful of people for whom the rods did not work. If you were unable to join our forays into the grounds of Lamorbey on the day of the Exhibition perhaps you would like to try now. With two metal rods made from wire coathangers and the correct grip, it is possible to experience this ancient form of technology.

The rods should have one limb approximately 40 cms (16 inches) long and the other about 15 cms (6 inches). These should be bent into a right angle or L shape. The rods should match if this is possible. "Sleeves" of empty Bic biro cases (which can be slipped over the shorter limbs) are non-essential refinements.

Hold the rods with one in each loosely clenched fist. Thumbs should rest on the finger nails of the forefingers. Keeping your elbows close to your waist hold the forearms in an horizontal position with the rods continuing this line. They should be parallel with each other.

Move slowly forward, in a relaxed manner, without looking at the rods. As soon as they move you will be aware of it. They will either open out to form a V or they will cross. When you walk beyond the point of reaction the rods will straighten.

Much enjoyment can be gained from watching the reactions of would be diviners and you never know - there may come a time when you need to track the route of your central heating system without taking up the floorboards!

I.E. Morris

CRYSTAL PALACE

Our Crystal Palace display, shown during the Lamorbey open evening, consisted of the remarkable sale catalogue published by the auctioneers, Knight, Frank & Rutley in 1911.

The catalogue contains a detailed account of just about everything that went on in the Palace, from 1851 to 1911.

It is profusely illustrated with numerous fine photographs and there is a splendid large scale map (measuring 3ft x 5ft) showing the entire property, including buildings and grounds.

In view of the considerable interest that now exists in all matters relating to the history of the Crystal Palace, it seems that our display was to say the least, topical.

The talk by Mr. Barrie McKay, arranged for 21st January 1987 here at Lamorbey was unavoidably cancelled due to severe weather conditions and we all hope that this special attraction can be re-scheduled soon, particularly as Mr. McKay is Chairman of the Crystal Palace Foundation.

A.W. Liverton

(Mr. Liverton is also a member of
The Crystal Palace Foundation)

BRASS RUBBING

"Where are you going, Mum?" ask our children as they watch us leave the house clutching flasks, large cushions and long rolls of paper. "We're off brass rubbing!" Looking at the snow on the ground the usual response is "You must be barmy!"

That just about sums up a brass rubber. Take it or leave it you have to be mildly mad to set off in the depths of winter to unheated churches and kneel on frozen floors, clutching blocks of wax with fingerless gloves and wondering if you dare take a swig from the coffee flask laced with whiskey!

Despite all this, we have come to love this sometimes tiring yet fascinating hobby. We are fortunate in this area to have many brasses still intact and worthy of a visit.

St. Mary's Church in Bexley has two such brasses, one of particular interest. The "Hunting Horn" brass of 1407 commemorates Henry Castilayn and the second commemorates Thomas Sparrow (1513). It was Thomas Sparrow sometimes known as Lamondby who owned the Lamorbey Park Estate.

We had particular difficulty in trying to trace the whereabouts of two brasses in a church in East Wickham. The Saxon church of St. Michael is now owned by the Greek Orthodox Church and it was difficult to contact them. However, with a bit of detective work we discovered the brasses were in the new church next door. A floriated cross of 1325 commemorates John and Maud de Bladigdone (Blendon) and is the oldest known surviving brass depicting a civilian. A later brass of 1568 shows William Payn, his wives and children. This gentleman was obviously conscious of his rank in the Yeoman of the Guard as he is uncharacteristically portrayed with his hands open, thus displaying his badge.

Sadly, many of the impressive collection of brasses at Holy Trinity in Dartford have been damaged and are now covered for their own protection. There are two brasses on show, one of which commemorates William Death, one of the founders of Dartford Grammar School. It is dated 1590 and an earlier brass of 1496 commemorates Katharine and Richard Burlton.

In the parish church of St. Mary the Virgin, St. Mary Cray, is the Avery Brass dated 1568 and a fine engraved effigy of Richard Manning and his wife dated 1604. Of special interest, if only for their crude craftsmanship are the Greenwood brasses of 1773.

A delightful surprise to be found at St. John the Baptist Church, Erith, is the finely detailed brass of Emma Wode 1471 who wears a very distinctive costume of the time. Several brasses both military and civilian are to be found in this church.

In searching for brasses we have had to use a lot of ingenuity such as phoning up hard worked vicars and churchwardens, making nuisances of ourselves at local museums, boring librarians with our questions and even listening in to conversations. We feel brasses provide an accurate and interesting historical record of fashions, social status, systems and an intimate insight into the lives of individuals. That is why we enjoy them so much.

Denise Baldwin and
Katherine Harding

(Affectionately known within the
Society as "The Girls")

Royal Park Estate Community Association

In the years immediately prior to World War II Ideal Homesteads Ltd. were building homes on the southern side of the railway at Albany Park, in the area now known as Royal Park.

At that time a Community Association was formed by the residents and the Ideal Homesteads gave a stretch of land, behind Davenport Road, in perpetuity, to the residents. Reg Pierce, together with other men, and with Ideal Homesteads' permission, salvaged a derelict hut from the builders compound and re-erected it on the land.

Trustees were appointed and a fund was started in order to erect a permanent building. Sums of £1 were loaned and held in trust.

A Scout group had been formed on the estate and was one of the Associations first sections to use the hut.

After the War building re-started and for every one hundred houses built, fifty had to be sold to the local Council to house the homeless and so the community grew. There were no buses serving the area and entrance to Albany Park Station was via a series of footpaths.

The community spirit flourished. In spite of the lack of conveniences - no mains water or sewerage laid on - the hut was in constant use. Annual General Meetings were held on a Sunday afternoon and from every direction people carrying a chair could be seen converging on the hut which was filled to capacity.

Numerous activities and societies met there. Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts, Ladies Choir, Old Time Dancing, Ballet Dancing for children and a Ladies Club. Football and Cricket Clubs were affiliated to the Association and met in the hut. A Don Bradman Cricket Wicket was later laid on the land for the Cricket Club. Work was started by Mr. Johnson to level the land for two tennis courts, but due to lack of physical support this was never completed.

The "Jolly Roger Club" transferred to the hut and a plea was put out for comfortable chairs for the old people to use. So great was the response that it was impossible to find space for them all.

The Ladies Choir gave concerts and the Scouts and Football Club gave Concert Parties. Again seats would be brought by the audience and so popular were these events they would have to be repeated so that everyone had the opportunity to see them.

Every winter a party was organised for the children. For several years this was held in a church hall in Hurst Road, Bexley. Volunteers would escort the children by train from Albany Park Station to Bexley and then shepherd them through Bexley Village. Tea was provided by the ladies, while the men kept the children under control. Entertainment was provided and games organised. The Mayor of Bexley would join in the festivities.

Another annual event was the May Queen ceremony. Several ladies would decide upon the dresses to be worn. Blue and gold were always the theme but the style was changed each year. Yards and yards of material would be bought and distributed to the mothers to be made up. Weeks of organisation and hours of sewing took place before the eventful day. The retinue consisted of a May Queen (elected each year), Prince Charming, Herald, Flower Girls and the ex-May Queen. The Sidcup Boys Brigade would be brought to Albany Park in a Council Dust Cart which Council employees had previously hosed down for the occasion. They would then set off from the assembly point leading the May Queen procession through the streets to the Association's land. The crowning of the May Queen took place followed by Maypole and Country Dancing and a Punch and Judy Show for the younger children, tea again being provided.

During the year of the Festival of Britain (1951) a competition was held for a Festival Queen. Professional actors and actresses performing at the Public Hall, Hatherley Road acted as judges and the chosen contestant was crowned Festival Queen during a day of festivity.

The Association was not only concerned with social activities but dealt also with amenity matters. After much pressure a bus service, Route 229, was brought into service running from Sidcup along Faraday Avenue to its turn round point in Wren Road. The bridge over the railway curtailed the length of the route as it was not considered strong enough to take buses.

With the help of Edward Heath, M.P. for Bexley, pressure was brought to bear on British Rail to build an entrance to Albany Park Station from the Royal Park side. A bridge was built over the railway linking Royal Park with the booking office.

For years Valentines Bridge which connected Longmead Drive with Hurst Road (via Valentines Avenue) had been closed causing a long detour for residents end of Longmead Drive. Following negotiations with Edward Heath, Alfred Barnes of British Transport Commission and British Rail, the parapets on either side of the bridge were raised and made safe for people to cross.

These were only a few of the matters which the Association dealt with on behalf of the residents.

Mr. Nash, secretary of the Association and then a Local Councillor, was instrumental in having a cricket wicket laid in Stable Meadow and a toilet block erected with changing room and chemical toilet.

Each year a fete and sports day was held on the Association land. Gangs of men would turn out after finishing their day's work to cut the long grass before the event took place. After a time Mr. Nash obtained help from the Council's Parks Department and the grass was cut for us.

An outstanding event was a mammoth Fete and Sports Day in Stable Meadow. Important guests were Miss Patricia Hornsby-Smith M.P., Mr. Edward Heath M.P. and Mr. Gordon Udall, Chairman of Chislehurst and Sidcup U.D.C. A display was given by the local branch of the Womens League of Health and Beauty. Official programmes were printed and invitations sent out to athletes to compete in the races.

Once again, we were greatly helped by the Chislehurst and Sidcup U.D.C. Parks Department, who loaned us a large marquee for refreshments. The whole area was mown, marked out for races and enclosed with ropes, all by Council staff and without charge. Side shows and a fancy dress competition formed part of the entertainment. All this took place under adverse conditions, road transport was via Footscray, a journey of approximately four miles and anything that could be taken on foot was moved across the Meadows via either the Five Arch or One Arch Bridge (the latter has now gone - vandalised!)

Although the day was not a financial success (the programmes being too ambitious and too costly), socially it was a huge success, making it all worthwhile for the helpers and organisers who worked from 7 a.m. until it was dark.

Hurst Community Centre was also the venue for some of the Fetes. An inter-street Tug of War was instituted and teams of men would be practising before the event. Here the Mayor of Bexley would be in attendance.

The biggest headache for the Committee was the maintenance of the hut. At first there was no mains water. All the water used was brought from a member's house and the only toilets were Elsen. Tea was brewed by boiling water on a primus stove. Eventually mains water was brought to the boundary of the Association's land, cutting down the distance for carrying water. An electric urn was purchased. The men were responsible for the Elsen closets and the ladies for cleaning the hut, often scrubbing the boards on their hands and knees. Heating was from two Army Hut type stoves and electric tubular heaters. It could be cold in winter but once the hut filled up, the heat built up.

With the growing numbers of youngsters a Youth Club was formed, under Mr. Bender. This was very successful until the rowdy element intruded. Rival gangs would come from as far away as Mottingham in an attempt to cause disruption. Our own daughter was threatened because her father turned them away. First the piano was wrecked and then one night the hut was damaged beyond repair.

Mr. Nash, the Secretary of the Association, negotiated with the F.E. Officer of Chislehurst and Sidcup U.D.C. to hand over the Association land to the Kent Education Authority and in return the authority would erect a purpose-built Youth Centre with some provision for adult use.

It was felt that this was the only solution. It had been a continuous struggle, albeit a pleasurable one, to keep the hut in good repair and hours of fund raising had gone into keeping it in existence. It was a place where people could meet and enjoy a village community spirit, but life was changing. The motor car and television had superseded the less sophisticated pleasures. One could almost say that the new bus route and easier access to trains and possibly the increased affluence changed the residents way of life.

The Secretary, with the members agreement, published a notice to this effect in a National newspaper, asking the Trustees permission. Although they had moved away by this time, they were traced and the next move was to repay those who had initially donated £1 to start the Association.

At this time the Greater London Boroughs came into being. The Kent Education Committee was no longer responsible for the Youth Centre and Chislehurst and Sidcup U.D.C. were submerged in the London Borough of Bexley. The Youth Club was built by Bexley on the land donated by the Royal Park Estate Community Association, but the agreement made by Chislehurst and Sidcup U.D.C. was not honoured by Bexley and the several adult activities which had hoped to use the premises were refused. Some finding accommodation elsewhere and then the Youth Club was officially opened.

So the Association which had been so much a part of the life of the Community came to an end.

Phyllis Nash

(This Article is a really valuable piece of Local and Social History. Has anyone else such memories.

Frances)

THE HAMLET OF HALFWAY STREET

When we thought of a project to link some of the material we had about the Hamlet of Halfway Street, we decided to base it on the Ordnance Survey map of 1860, prior to the advent of the railways.

We obtained copies of this map from Hall Place Local Studies Section. We already had photocopies of photographs of Halfway Street used in an exhibition for the closure of Halfway Street Infants School. Most of these came from Hall Place.

We have been able to pinpoint actual houses as some of these are still standing, while others have been demolished.

Then we hoped to glean some idea of the families who lived in the area by checking the rates book of 1860 and we extracted the following information:

6 Large Houses	54 Cottages	2 Lodges
2 Farms	2 Churches/Chapel	
1 School	1 Smithy	
1 Carpenter	1 Butcher & Grocer	
1 Coal Dealer	1 Pub	

The next step was to cross-check the census returns of 1861 and in order to cut down on the amount of time spent at Hall Place, sitting in front of a microfilm reader we asked for photocopies, some twelve in all.

This is where the problems began. The writing of the enumerator was not easy to read on the machine, but on the poor quality copy was extremely difficult. Keith (Anne's husband) came to the rescue and carefully transcribed the details of the census returns together with the rates book.

As the cottages were not named on the census we found the tithe apportionment book and map of 1839 gave us several clues.

Our display consisted of various photographs, photocopies, transcribed lists and maps we have collected so far.

We are only too aware of the vast amount of work still to be done on the project.

More time is needed on it than we seem able to find, but it has given us an enormous amount of interest and pleasure.

Anne Brunton and
Angela Everett

I do hope that you have enjoyed reading the articles on the Exhibition, They were written by busy people and I thank them on behalf of the Society.

We welcome new members to the Society and hope they will very soon feel that they are amongst friends. If you are new to the Sidcup area we will be only too pleased to give you as much information as possible on the local history background. Conversely, if you are a longtime resident please hand on snippets or remembrances of the past that will interest us all. If you have any documents etc. concerning our area i.e. Blackfen, Lamorbey, Sidcup, Foots Cray and North Cray that you would be willing to pass on we shall be only too pleased to place them in our archives. You might not wish to part with a particular item - perhaps we could photograph it and return it to you.

New members, please do not hide your talents - if you have a hobby that has a link with local history or might be able to address the Society on an interesting topic, please let Miss Iris Morris (Chairman) or myself (Secretary) know. You can always phone me at home (01-300 1511) if you feel rather shy of speaking to us at meetings.

In an earlier newsletter I commented on the Hollies being sold by Southwark Borough Council and that the area bordered by Willersley Avenue, Halfway Street and Burnt Oak Lane would change out of all recognition. You must all be aware of the houses now erected at the corner of Willersley Avenue and Halfway Street and the complex springing up at the other end of Willersley. The central core of the Hollies has been declared a Conservation Area.

Society member, Angela Everett, is our representative on the Borough's Conservation Advisory Panel and can therefore comment on the Bexley Conservation Areas i.e. Bexley Village, Red House Lane, Iron Mill Lane, Halfway Street and the Hollies. We can also do our part by writing to the relevant authorities on planning etc. that does not meet with our approval. A classic case is, of course, the ill-fated Hall Place Barn. From a Society point of view please photograph buildings etc. where we know that change will take place. We must record these happenings! I know some members have recently been photographing Sidcup Station as it is to be redesigned. BE VIGILANT!!

The frontispiece of this newsletter was drawn by Iris Morris. We hope to use it with all future newsletters as our Society Logo. This seems an inadequate word for a superb piece of work - the original unfortunately had not photocopied well. I will have it framed so you can all see this beautiful drawing at its best.

Here's to a happy Society Year.

Frances Oxley
(Secretary and on this occasion
Editor)

Newsletter