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Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society

At last "The Great Store" is ready and will be available to members at the second Autumn Term Meeting, 9th October. You will surely all remember how on many occasions I tried to use my powers of persuasion requesting members to write of their own October 1987 Hurricane experience. To my delight eventually articles and photographs started trickling in and before long there was enough material to produce a booklet. It has gone through various stages, commencing with our Chairman, Iris Morris, editing and typing each article. Then over a two day period she produced some really delightful drawings. The one on the front cover really does convey the force and power of the Hurricane and in a quiet way tells the story of the loss of matches and a candle. If any of you came on that fateful night must have wished you kept a diary of the night.

Iris then passed the book to me for proof reading. I found it back again for many days. It lay dormant for some time as I was busy with my other commitments. You are all aware that the book was printed on 10th October 1987.

Our first meeting since the book was printed was on 11th October 1987. The book was the main item on the agenda and was well received. The Secretary, Iris Morris, presented the book to the members.

The book is available to members at the price of £1.00. It is so interesting and informative that it is well worth a read. The archive will be open to members from the 1st of November.

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Again, during meetings I made a plea for war-time news report articles. Again, I was not disappointed and the result was some articles for this newsletter. By the time you read this I expect that the Sidcup Times will have published perhaps a whole edition or several pages taking us down nearly late to September 1945. Perhaps it will all provide material long hidden and other members will be induced to write perhaps a short piece for the archives?

Newsletter

Autumn 1989

This time last year I was reporting that Dr. John Mercer's book on Sidcup was about to be published. Since then the book has sold well even to the extent of Local Family History Societies receiving orders for it from some of their overseas members. John's hard work of research etc. has really proved worthwhile. He is already into the next book, an up to date history of Lamborbey, which should sell equally as well as "The Sidcup Story".

At last "The Great Storm" is ready and will be available to members at the second Autumn Term meeting, 4th October. You will surely all remember how on many occasions I tried to use my powers of persuasion requesting members to write of their own October 1987 Hurricane experience. To my delight eventually articles and photographs started trickling in and before long there was enough material to produce a booklet. It has gone through various stages, commencing with our Chairman, Iris Morris, editing and typing each article. Then over a two day period she produced some really delightful drawings. The one on the front cover really does convey the force and power of the Hurricane and on a gentler note the evocative ones of the box of matches and a candle. Those of you awake on that fateful night must have wished you kept these in more accessible places.

Iris then passed the parcel onto me for proof reading and I passed it back again for minor adjustments. What to do with the parcel next? It lay dormant for some time whilst Eric, Norma and myself sought quotes on printing and photocopying, which really stunned us. In the end, the parcel was passed to Mary Percival who very kindly got the booklet photocopied for us. This led to a bun fight at the Percival home when Eric, Mary, Norma, Pam and myself sat collating, folding and stapling the booklets.

Our first foray into print was the Footscray leaflet by Kathy Harding and Denise Baldwin, which was indeed a highlight for the Society. On this second occasion many more members have been involved with the writing and producing and so it has been a real Society effort. Please buy a copy, I am sure it will vividly remind you of the ill-fated '16th'.

As Secretary, I am so pleased that this second work will be placed in the Society's Archives together with the excellent photographs. Two years has elapsed since the storm so the work is already of historical interest.

Our Archivist, Eric Percival, later in this newsletter is requesting once again your indulgence on archive material. Please heed him and pass on to the Society any printed matter etc. of affairs in the Local Community. It is so interesting on our quiet evenings when Eric brings along some of the archive material for us to pore over and muse on the ephemera from say the Second World War. Is it really half a century since the commencement of the War, to some people it seems like yesterday.

Again, during meetings I made a plea for war-time home front articles. Again, I was not disappointed and the result was some articles for this newsletter. By the time you read this I expect that the Sidcup Times will have published perhaps a whole edition or several pages taking us down memory lane to September 1939. Perhaps it will all provoke memories long hidden and other members will be induced to write perhaps a short piece for the archives?

The most recent happening was the threat of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link coming overland through Sidcup. From about November 1988 many residents near the rail line had their lives blighted through the threat of their property being compulsorily purchased or living with the constant noise and vibration of the high speed trains. Local people were so incensed with this outlook that protest groups just mushroomed. The work done by these groups and the Local MP's made the British Rail Board rescind their original plans and substitute a tunnel parallel to the A20 along the Sidcup-by-Pass. Had the original plans gone ahead our locality would have altered out of all recognition. So our grateful thanks must be extended to these various organisations for their tireless work. I am hopeful that the Secretary of the Lamorbey Residents Protest Group will pass over his entire Rail File for our archives.

Frances Oxley
Editor

Archives

The Society's archives are neither extensive nor rare, however, we do have one or two useful things such as 1930 and 1931 Kellys Directories of Sidcup and the auctioneers catalogue covering the sale of part of the High Street, but we are always endeavouring to improve our collection. We could never hope, nor would we want to rival the Borough's Local History Library at Hall Place, so what can we do? We can take photographs of our nearby shops recording changes in use and prices of goods on sale (have a look at photos of petrol stations five years ago and note the costs). Note where and when a baker became an estate agent, record the demolishing of the old houses and the replacement by retirement homes - how much longer is that going to continue? When taking photographs always try to put into your picture something that will indicate time - a car or women's fashions! This is an on going programme, use the last couple of films in your camera when you come back from holiday in this way. Don't waste film on the cat or dog. Another very rewarding activity is to open a scrapbook on a specific event, the rail link comes to mind, but it could also cover the future of Grassington Road - take your photo now!! Many churches and schools will soon be celebrating their diamond jubilee; how about collecting any printed material which may be produced to mark the event, just think how much interest these will have in twenty years time.

The Society is always pleased to accept donations. In this way we can build a useful store to be of use to members of this Society in the years to come.

Eric Percival
Archivist

Weather Report

What a strange winter we have had here in the south - in fact it has hardly been a winter at all. Many spring plants were in flower just after Christmas, there has been very little rain and just a couple of nights of heavy frost. Although we were pleased to have come through the period with the minimum of physical hazard the strangeness of it all has not passed without a few worried comments. This has brought to mind the important part the weather played in the lives of our predecessors. The Anglo-Saxon Chroniclers were most particular in noting down any strange anomalies or adverse weather conditions. Here are a few from about 900 years ago ... before holes in ozone layers and the 'Greenhouse Effect' could be given as an explanation.

1095 In this same year also the weather was very unseasonable; consequently all the crops were poor throughout the whole country.

1097 Then after Michaelmas, on 4th October, a strange star appeared, shining in the evening and setting early. It was seen in the south-west, and the trail of light that shone out from it towards the south-east appeared to be very long, and was visible like this for almost a whole week. Many men said it was a comet.

In all respects this was a very severe year, and particularly disastrous on account of the bad weather, both when the land had to be tilled and again when the crops were harvested, and there was no relief from excessive taxation.

1098 Before Michaelmas the sky appeared almost the whole night as if it were on fire. This was a very disastrous year because of excessive taxation, and on account of the heavy rains which did not leave off throughout the whole year: nearly all the cultivated land in low-lying districts was ruined.

1103 In this year too, at Finchhampstead in Berkshire, blood was seen coming from the ground. It was a very disastrous year here in this country by reason of numerous taxes and also as a result of murrain and the ruin of the harvest, both of corn and of fruit on all the trees. Further, on the morning of St. Lawrence's day (10th August), the wind did such great damage here in the land to all the crops that nobody remembered anything like it before.

1104 In this year the first of Whitsuntide was on 5th June, and on the following Tuesday at noon there appeared four interesting halos around the sun, white in colour, and looking as if they had been painted. All who saw it were astonished, for they did not remember seeing anything like it before.

1105 On the eve of Cena Domini, the Thursday before Easter, two moons were seen in the sky before day, one to the east and the other to the west, and both at the full, and that same day the moon was a fortnight old.

1111 The winter this year was very long, the weather bitter and severe; in consequence the crops were badly damaged, and there was the worst murrain in living memory.

1112 This was a very good year and very productive in woods and open country, but it was a very sad year and anxious time on account of a fearful pestilence.

1113 Also one day in this year there was an ebb-tide which was everywhere lower than any man remembered before; so people went riding and walking across the Thames to the east of London Bridge. In this year there were very strong winds in the month of October, but exceptionally violent on the night of 18th November and left a trail of damage everywhere in woods and villages.

These extracts have been taken from The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle translated by G.N. Garmonsway.

The Lady of Lamorbey

As she gazed at her reflection in one of the long mirrors in the library, she saw a pair of beautiful green eyes, which glittered in the sunlight coming through the windows, the glossy blackness of her mantle had a wonderful sheen.

Everyone told her she was beautiful and they were so kind to her, ever since she had wandered in, homeless and heavily pregnant over ten long years ago. She remembered, and they at Lamorbey had taken her, a complete stranger, cared for her and given her the love she had craved.

During the time she had lived here, she had borne six children, two of them were in America and the others had been adopted.

At first during the early years, she had a companion, but was now alone. She reigned supreme, she was content and roamed the lovely old mansion with its long and colourful history - happy to be the Lady of Lamorbey.

She noticed the angle of the sun, shining on the water of the lake and realised it was time for her lunch. She stretched lazely and rose from her comfortable golden chair. It was time soon she knew that the noisy lot would be arriving and filling up all the chairs.

As she walked slowly up the grand staircase, she paused at the top and the doors were opened for her, as became her station. Another door was opened as she made her stately approach and with a flick of her glossy black tail she entered the room, to be greeted with cries of 'On time as usual'. The Lamorbey Adult Education Centre's cat had come for her lunch.

Ricky Richardson

Lewis Pendarves Kekewich, Esq. J.P.

Although living at the beautiful estate in Kent known as Lamorbey Park, Mr. Lewis Pendarves Kekewich is a representative of an old Devonshire family, several of whose members have attained distinction in the legal profession, the army, and in the cause of education. Born at Edgbaston in 1859, he is the third son of Trehawke Kekewich Esq. of Peamore, Devon, by his first marriage with Charlotte, daughter of Captain George Peard, R.N.

Mr. Lewis Pendarves Kekewich was educated at Marlborough College. He is married to Lilian Emily, daughter of Sampson Hanbury, Esq., D.L. of Bishopstowe, Devon, and has four sons and a daughter. The oldest brother of Mr. Kekewich, Trehawke Herbert, is Recorder of Tiverton, while another brother, Major-General Robert George Kekewich, C.B., has served in the Malay Peninsula, in the Nile Expedition, at Suakim, and in South Africa, where he was mentioned in despatches, and will always be remembered as one of the brave defenders of Kimberley, where he commanded throughout the siege.

The earliest mentioned ancestors of the Kekewich family were settled at different periods in Cheshire, Lincolnshire, and Shropshire in the sixteenth century; a branch of the family removed to Cornwall, but eventually settled in Devon. Towards the end of the seventeenth century we hear of Samuel Kekewich, who lived for many years in Spain. His first wife, Frideswide Crofte, died in that country in 1693.

A few years later he married Mary, daughter of Stephen Pendarves, of Padstowe. His fourth son, Pendarves Kekewich, born in 1697, was the grandfather of the late Samuel Trehawke Kekewich, M.P., father of Trehawke Kekewich Esq., D.L. the present head of the family; of the Right Hon. Sir Arthur Kekewich, Judge of the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice since 1886, and recently made a Privy Councillor; and of Sir George William Kekewich, K.C.B., D.C.L., late Secretary of the Board of Education. Another distinguished son of this family was Lieutenant Lewis Kekewich, who fought at Alma and Balaclava. He was wounded at Inkerman, and died at Corfu in 1855.

Lamorbey Park, the Kentish home of Mr. Lewis Pendarves Kekewich, is an estate dating from the fifteenth century. In old records it is called 'Lamienby', from a family of that name who once held the Manor. The last descendent of this family was Thomas Sparrow, who died in 1513. He left a daughter, who carried the estate in marriage to James Goldwell, who erected a very handsome mansion on the site of the old house. His grandson, John, lived there in the reign of Charles I.

In later years the property changed hands several times. It passed from the Warrens to the Fosters, and in 1744 was sold to William Steele, who built the present house, and laid out the park which is famed for its beautiful trees and ornamental lakes.

Mr. Pendarves Kekewich is J.P. for his adopted county, and takes a practical interest in local politics, being Chairman of the Conservative and Unionist Association at Sidcup. For some years he was President of the Sidcup Hospital, and is a generous patron of other institutions in the neighbourhood.

His favourite recreations are hunting, golf and cricket. For many years he has followed the West Kent Foxhounds, and is now Master of the West Kent Harriers.

Taken from a book in the Maidstone Local History Library



L. P. Kekewich, Esq., J.P.

WAR TIME MEMORIES

End of a Sentimental Journey

I had wanted to return to Burwash for twenty years. The memories of a nine months' stay in that small Sussex village are among my clearest; the time spent there had been the first independent experience of my life. Till the outbreak of war when I was evacuated there, I had lived at home, an only child in a working-class family, with a scholarship to a secondary school. Now I was a 'vacuee', one of thousands of uprooted children who found new homes and new experiences.

So much happened to us from the first of September 1939 onwards that the war took second place in our lives. Of greater importance was the transition from London to the country.

Burwash is a delightful place, attractive with limes, straddling the main road between Hawkhurst and Lewes. On arrival we were assigned to billets, taken off by our enforced foster parents and quickly settled in. We had little or no choice in going, nor they in accepting us. For ten shillings a week they fed and sheltered us, and coped with varying reactions to this invasion of their homes.

That autumn, the first I had ever spent away from London, was beautiful. After the first flurry of arrival there followed weeks of inaction. The 'phoney war' had begun, but to us in the country it was the most delightful holiday of our lives. While the school staff worked urgently, organising us as a unit again, obtaining buildings, keeping in touch with five hundred pupils, smoothing out thorny problems of billets and arguments, we explored the village and countryside in a time that was golden.

My foster mother was a young matron of twenty-two, recently married to a much older man. Presented with two teenagers - a term unused then - from a New Cross school, and a young brother and sister from Lewisham, she coped as best she could. Our rock of ages and the prop of the whole situation, however, was Violet the maid. A solid, comfortable country woman in her fifties, she had been in service with the master's parents long before the advent of 'young madam', whom she dismissed with a toss of the head most of the time. There were moments of crisis, however, when 'young madam's' precariously acquired dignity carried the day, and Violet would then bang doors and work with an alarming vigour which reduced us all to silence tempered with servile offers of assistance!

The vacuees' place was in the kitchen with the maid, and she mothered and bullied us as though she had possessed us all our lives. I have a photograph we persuaded her to pose for one afternoon after she had changed. She stands in the garden, neat and tidy in a black dress and white broderie apron. A little white cap is perched on iron-grey hair, strained back, but with two severe curls parallel above each ear. Her eyes are bright and bird-like, her hands half-smooth her apron in a familiar gesture and she looks anxious to be gone.

Violet was undoubtedly the reason we derived so much enjoyment and pleasure from those first weeks. Unlike many children uprooted in this way we had no worries or unease. With the supreme selfishness of the young we accepted her ministrations in place of our mothers'. We missed our parents, of course, wrote home regularly and eagerly awaited their replies, but the splendid autumn days were filled with wanderings and excursions in a delightful part of Sussex, with little thought to the happenings at home or abroad.

As the autumn progressed school was reopened in the large empty house two miles from the village. Quickly, many hands made it alive again. The panelled dining-room and bedrooms became classrooms, the greenhouses science labs, the stables a library, the overgrown garden was cleared and planted. A winding path took us across the grounds to a private chapel, now the Assembly Hall. In a short time we established a flourishing community.

By the summer of 1940 it seemed impossible we had ever led other lives. Visits home at Christmas and Easter passed only as episodes. The war seemed very far away. A night raider dropped a bomb at Ticehurst, killed a few chickens and provided a nine days' wonder. The weather also conspired to produce the illusion of another world. The last days of the 'phoney war' are etched in my mind in sunlight.

We heard of the fall of France on the one-o'clock news after a lunchtime session of music. We were sitting on the broad stone steps of Hollyhurst, the magnificent view of the Sussex weald framed by oak trees, the clear, limpid tones of Mozart in our ears. Soon after, danger of invasion caused 're-evacuation' to a Welsh mining village.

Some years ago my husband and I drove down to Burwash. It was my first visit back. I felt it had changed very little; he seemed disappointed and to feel that I had exaggerated its charm. We inquired for Violet, and drove on to Staplehurst where she was now living. She received us politely and served tea. She was obviously troubled that she could not remember me at all.

Bess Dzielski

War Time Thoughts of Mrs. Cole's Mother

My husband had joined the Territorials with his two brothers-in-law and the Police called at the house to say he would not be returning home from work that night because he had been called up.

It was a bright sunny day, I was expecting visitors, my brother and his wife from Birmingham. I had a lovely leg of lamb. I stood looking out of the window, standing beside my bush console radio when Mr. Chamberlain announced that war had been declared. A few minutes afterwards the sirens sounded. My brother sent a telegram to say he would not be coming. It cost 6s 6d. return from Birmingham to Sidcup and took approximately two hours.

We were ordered to black out all the windows using anything which was available. I seem to remember we had shutters.

I remember the first air raid, another sunny day, they were like silver fish in the sky - they passed over and knocked hell out of the docks. There were many dog fights in the air.

We had the windows broken and the roof damaged time after time. The workmen came with the carton which had held cigarettes to repair the roof because they didn't have enough tarpaulin. Then the rain ran down the stairs.

People going up and down the road bleeding from broken glass.

If you saw two people standing at a shop you joined the queue, without knowing what you might buy, in the hope of getting something for the children.

A story I remember. There was a family in a shelter during a heavy raid. The mother said 'Cover that clock over because I can't sleep for the ticking

of it'. Outside the guns boomed and the bombs fell, but she couldn't sleep for the sound of the clock.

Air raid wardens saying 'put that light out' even if it was just a cigarette.

I remember not having any coal. I burned blocks of salt when one of the children was ill. Another time I had a hugh log of wood which stretched across the room, as it burned I pushed it further into the fire - I was unable to chop it.

I remember Queen Mary's Hospital being bombed (the old one).

I remember after a really terrible, terrible night thinking that when I looked in the mirror my hair will be white, I couldn't have gone through such a night without it turning white, but it hadn't.

I remember neighbours asking to be with me saying I gave them courage, thinking I was brave, but inside I wasn't. Anyone who said they were not afraid was lying or a fool.

I grew vegetables and kept chickens and rabbits and a goose called Billy. One day Billy laid an egg and became Belinda. One day the chickens got out and went for a walk down Longlands Road - I had to go out after them with corn to get them back.

Rationing went on for a long time after the war and we were almost worse off because everyone was tired after the heavy raiding, and the war had to be paid for, and everyone would say we didn't care what happened as long as we didn't have the raids.

I remember standing at my back door with a frying pan in my hand to hit back the flying bomb which was approaching my house. It turned and landed in Priestlands Park. A friend outside Cliffords Garage, Main Road, said it was over my house and she watched it turn. A miracle. There was a land mine in Longlands Road and I remember Old Kent Road on fire.

I remember my brother-in-law turning up on my doorstep having been bombed out - complete with chickens and rabbits, husband and wife and child and her sister and three children. I was unable to cope and had to send the sister away.

I went home to Birmingham for a rest - it took all day and I arrived with the children at midnight. I stayed about two weeks then Birmingham was bombed and typhoid broke out and I returned to London - but quick. During the journey home the money boxes belonging to the children were taken from the luggage. In those days if you were making a journey the railways would collect your luggage from your home and deliver it to your final destination. This was called luggage in advance.

During the war everyone pulled together helping each other - at war's end everyone went in and shut their doors.

Childhood Memories of the War

At the outbreak of war in September 1939 I was living in Valliers Wood Road, Sidcup with my parents Ralph and Violet Hall, my brother Peter, who was then aged ten, and my sister Kathleen, aged six. I was looking forward to my eighth birthday at the end of the month. We were due to go away on holiday on the first Saturday of September to Bexhill-on-Sea, but with the threat of war everyone was sure the bombing would start immediately so the thought of going to the coast was out of the question. Our parents then decided to take us all to Leatherhead to stay with a great-aunt. Quite how they would have let her know we were coming, all five of us, to her small two bedroomed cottage where my grandmother was also living, I cannot imagine as no one that I knew had the telephone in those far off days. I do remember my brother being sent to the station to take back the tickets already purchased for our holiday and to enquire about trains to Leatherhead.

On Sunday, September 3rd, at 11 o'clock we, along with everyone else in the Country, listened to the radio as the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, made the well known speech declaring that following Germany's take over in Poland, England was at war. The sirens were then sounded followed shortly afterwards by the all clear. We spent approximately six weeks in the country thoroughly enjoying ourselves, although after two weeks my father returned to his work. He was employed as a civil servant in the local Labour Exchange. Mother was a music teacher and taught both the piano and violin at home so I presume she let her pupils know we were going away for a time, but she carried on teaching when we returned home and for the remainder of the war, bombs etc. permitting.

When we came back we resumed our schooling. I was due to start at the junior school in Burnt Oak Lane, but my sister, who was still in Halfway Street Infant School, was taught at home for some time. The teacher used to come to the house and teach all the young children in that road, then the next day they would meet at another house. I am not sure how long this system lasted and whether it started at the outbreak of war or later on. We endured what was termed 'the phoney war' for twelve months before the bombing started. The government provided every household with an Anderson Shelter which was made of corrugated iron and had to be bolted together and sunk down into the earth. Father made some bunks to fit in the shelter but it was very damp, although we had a heater down there to keep us warm and candles to see by. The top of the shelter was covered in earth and on this he grew a good crop of marrows. He also took an allotment in Old Farm Avenue, but as I recall the only successful things he grew were potatoes and curly kale, which none of us were partial to, so I am not quite sure what he did with the surplus!

Father, along with other men not eligible to fight in the war, was made an air raid warden and he also had to take his turn of fire duty at the office. Both these jobs meant taking a turn either with the other men in the street or staff at the office and spending the night keeping a watchful eye for bombs. Incendiary bombs were rather dangerous. They were dropped in a stick and I remember one falling across the houses in our road causing considerable damage if the fires they caused were not doused quickly. I well remember the blitz when the bombers came over every night and we had to spend the time in the shelter. Mother used to read to us and I remember thinking 'I hope there is a raid tonight so that we can have another chapter of the book'. There was one particular book by Sheila Kaye-Smith entitled 'The Children's Summer' and that seemed to go on for ages. I saw the book recently in the library and reread it for old times sake. It was in fact quite a short novel so the mind must play tricks with one.

Apart from air raid shelters every person was issued with a gas mask to be used when the Germans dropped containers filled with gas. As it happened this never occurred and the only time I can recall wearing my gas mask was during practice at school and occasionally they had a van parked in the High Street, which I presume was filled with some kind of non-toxic gas. We had to don our gas masks and pass through the van to see if they were effective. All the children had to take gas masks to school, together with a packed lunch in case we could not get home to dinner. Willersley Avenue was half-way between home and school and all the children were told if they had not reached that main road and the warning went we had to run home. If we had already crossed the road we had to run fast to school. I recall the first girl in our class to be bombed out of her home. She lived in Marlborough Park Avenue. For some time afterwards I used to wish we could be bombed out so that I could tell everyone about the experience. I was young enough to enjoy the war without being too frightened or to realise the awful consequences of losing one's home and loved ones. Peter attended the grammar school which was then situated at Crittalls Corner and several times he managed to cycle home through the bombing. Apparently only the older boys were allowed home, but somehow he always managed to get through the cordon and cycle home. Sometimes he would say he had been watching a dog-fight. I did not realise this meant a fight between the German planes and our own and wondered why he bothered to stand around watching two dogs fighting! I can clearly remember seeing the sky bright red when the German's attacked Silvertown, North Woolwich, setting the whole town alight. We had a family move into our road from there and I still keep in touch with my friends after all this time.

Everyone was urged to save waste paper and other recycleable household refuse to help the war effort. Father made us a wooden barrow on two wheels and one or two of us would call at each house in our road on a Saturday morning to collect salvage, mainly newspapers and magazines, etc. These we would trundle down the road to a large shed situated at the rear of the shops. Each load was weighed and I believe we were paid something like one penny per load. I am not quite sure now how this worked because I am sure we were not the only children in our road with a barrow.

When the siren went everyone took cover, either in their own air raid shelter or, if you were out, there were public shelters situated in various parts of the town. Because the Anderson Shelters were very damp the government agreed they should be cemented inside and whilst this work was carried out our family spent a few nights in the public shelter underneath the Co-Op Store in Halfway Street. We thought this was great fun as we slept on very narrow bunks with all the neighbours around us. Bombs would come whizzing down and off would fire the ack-ack guns. In May 1941 a two thousand pound bomb fell in the garden next-door-but-one to us and blew all our windows out causing considerable damage although we were able to remain in the house. All windows had to be criss-crossed with wide sticky paper which helped to prevent the glass splintering. Quite a lot of damage was done to houses by the blast from bombs.

About this time my brother was taken ill with tuberculosis and had to go away to hospital in Lenham. Mother had to obtain a special warrant enabling her to travel out of the area by bus to visit him. Peter was in hospital for about six months during 1942. Every citizen was issued with an identity card and these were numbered. Father's number was CJR40 and the rest of the family had consecutive numbers. Food was rationed and each member of the family had a ration card. Each family registered with a particular grocer or butcher and did not have a choice. Fish was never rationed, or bread (until after the war). Vegetables could be brought, but I think certain things were unobtainable, especially fruit such as oranges and bananas. Sweets were also rationed along with basic foods.

In 1943 my mother was ill in hospital for six months so my sister and I went to stay with an aunt and uncle in Leytonstone. I recall I did not want to go away and begged my mother to let Kathleen and I stay at home with my father. I even suggested we might be able to live at the Hollies Children's Home so that we would not have to leave our schools and all our friends. I was only eleven at this time and I do not suppose we could have gone to the Hollies. My brother did remain at home being that little bit older, but my sister and I were sent away. Mother had to make other arrangements for her music pupils and I believe Miss Hammond (a former member of the Local History Society) agreed to take some of the pupils on a temporary basis. My father also taught a few of them at home.

Aunt Jenny and Uncle Bert had four children all considerably older than us. The eldest son was at home, but his two brothers were fighting in the war. Henry was a bomber pilot. Unfortunately his plane was badly damaged over Germany, but he managed to limp home, crash landing in the Yorkshire Dales as a result of which he lost his life. Cousin Ronald was with the Eighth Army and fought in North Africa and in the Italian Campaign. I remember I used to write to him each week on a special form obtainable from the Post office. You had to write in quite large lettering as the form was subsequently reduced in size by some kind of photography before being sent overseas. My cousin, Muriel, joined the WAAF shortly after we went to live in Leytonstone. Although there were not many raids at this time I think my aunt realised she had a responsibility with two young children in her care so each evening we would go along to sleep in the shelter at Leytonstone Underground Station. The Central Line had just been started at the outbreak of war and Leytonstone was where the line ended. Uncle stayed at home in bed and each morning aunty would wake us up at about 5.30 so that we could go home as she preferred to wake up in the morning in her own bed. I think this went on practically the whole of the six months we lived there, although I cannot recall any serious bombing raids during this period. I attended the Connaught Road School and was quite happy. Father used to visit us once or twice a month, but we were only taken once to visit my mother in hospital. I had never had my hair cut and had very long blonde ringlets, although my sister's hair was cut into a short bob. I hated my hair and was always asking my mother to let me have it cut, but she was adamant that it remain long. Anyway I do not know how I caught them, but one night my aunt discovered my head was 'alive'. She took me out to the backyard, with my sister holding a torch, and promptly cut off all my lovely curls. The next day by coincidence a letter arrived from my mother to my aunt telling her not to let me persuade her to have my hair cut. By that time it was too late and that was the one week when we were to visit mother in hospital. She was horrified when she saw me and it took her some time to get over the shock.

We returned home in October 1943 when I resumed my schooling at the Secondary School for Girls in Alma Road. Again, I cannot remember many raids at this period of the war, but in February 1944 the Germans started sending over the V1 rockets or flying bombs as they were called. They used to glide over not making any noise and then would suddenly switch off and come straight down devastating anything in their path. My friend and I used to frighten our parents by going off on our cycles to see where they had landed. I also recall at one time there was an unexploded land mine in Old Farm Avenue which was detonated one Sunday morning and it rocked houses for quite a distance around it and I believe some houses were destroyed, but without loss of life. Sidcup suffered considerably from the bombing both during the blitz and when the V1s and V2s were in use. One V1 destroyed the Odeon Cinema near Sidcup Station, also causing considerable damage to Holy Trinity Church.

At this time my younger sister Kathleen became very frightened of the flying bombs and as a result my mother contacted her niece, with whom up to that time the only contact had been through Christmas Cards, to see whether we could stay with her for a while in Oxford. She wrote back agreeing to have us. Peter was then in the sanatorium in Lenham as he had a recurrence of his previous illness so he was well cared for. So the day came to pack our things and go off into the complete unknown to meet people whom we had never seen. Father travelled with us and we went by train from Paddington. I did not know much about Oxford at that time (I was then 12 years old) except that it was a university city and everyone there must be very well-off. Thus I reassured my sister, who was a little tearful, that everything was going to be fine and we would probably even have a nursery in the large house where we were to live. How disillusioned I was, therefore, to arrive in a small street of houses each one like its neighbour. Where were the big houses and servants of whom I had dreamed? Nevertheless, Dolly made us welcome although she had four children all under nine years old, the youngest a baby of two. Her way of life was totally different to that with which we were accustomed, but children soon adapt, although at first we were dreadfully homesick and spent the best part of each day crying and comforting one another. I used to have ideas for running back home, but did not know how we could put this into action. Dolly herself had been brought up in an orphanage and did not have much idea of how to run a home, let alone bring up four children. I did hear in later life that altogether she had ten children spread over twenty years.

It was towards the end of June when we arrived in Oxford and no mention was made of us going to school, although just prior to leaving Sidcup, Kathleen learnt that she had passed the scholarship to the grammar school. When we had been in Oxford about four weeks I received a telegram from home. It merely said 'Been bombed out. Coming down on the 10 o'clock train. Love Mum'. No mention of poor old Dad and both Kathleen and I shed a few tears, not knowing how bad things were at home. In those days very few people had telephones in their home so you had to rely on the post and telegram service. Anyway, Mother duly arrived, telling us that a flying bomb had fallen on the houses opposite, totally destroying several. Our house was uninhabitable, and our parents were told they would have to move out. My two grandmothers, who shared half-a-house opposite our home, had both been injured and were in Queen Mary's Hospital. They were subsequently evacuated to a hospital in Oldham where father's mother died later in 1944 after falling out of bed. Our maternal grandmother eventually returned to Sidcup and lived there until her death in 1949.

But to return to Oxford - that wonderful City of Dreaming Spires. Once mother arrived things improved slightly, although we were vastly overcrowded with three adults and six children in a three bedroomed house. The first thing we did was to look at suitable schools. Kathleen was quite easy to place as the only grammar school in the locality was Milham Ford Grammar. It was a little way out of the city and quite a journey. Mother did not want me to go to the local senior school as it was mixed and she did not think it very suitable. I therefore attended St. Denise School just off the Banbury Road. This was a Church of England Covent School run by Nuns. The children there ranged from five to fourteen years of age, but we only had four classrooms. Life there was quite good and I think I learned a good deal and really liked being at that school. I took French as an extra lesson, since mother thought it would be a good idea to continue with this as we had started to learn it at Alma Road. This was discontinued at that school since Miss Hayward, the headmistress at that time, thought we should learn to speak the King's English correctly before learning a foreign language and after I left the school in 1945, French was not on the curriculum again until the new headmistress arrived in (I think) the early fifties!

We did not hear much of the war in Oxford apart from news items on the radio and what was in the papers. I do remember seeing all the planes going over to Europe one day. Oxford was also populated with its fair share of American soldiers, as there were several camps in the vicinity. We used to stand along the bypass to see the convoys driving through and sometimes the GIs would throw us out some sweets. Dolly's husband, Jerry, was in the army and billeted at Bicester all through the war so he used to be able to come home every night. He was quite good fun and played the saxophone in a dance band.

We stayed with our cousin until the Christmas when mother had had enough of the overcrowding and decided to do something about the situation. Oxford at that time was not a receiving centre for evacuees so we could get no help from the authorities. She therefore placed two advertisements in the local paper - one asking if anyone could give a home to a healthy twelve year old girl and the other offering her services as a housekeeper with one child. She placed a separate advertisement for me as she did not think anyone would employ someone with two children. She had several replies to both advertisements and I was almost set to go and meet a family in Gloucester. The mother wrote an interesting letter. They had a son the same age as myself and as they were keen cyclists they were prepared to fix me up with a cycle so that I could partake of their family outings. I often wonder if my life might have taken a different turn if mother had taken up the offer! She went for several interviews herself. One was with a farmer who arranged to meet her at a hotel in the city and take her to lunch. She returned rather disillusioned from that outing and almost gave up the search.

Mother then received a letter from a professor and his wife who lived in Summertown, a small suburb of Oxford not far from my school. We all went along one evening for the interview and when Mrs. Campbell saw both of us girls she said there was plenty of room and she saw no reason to split the family up. My mother accepted the job and we went to live in this very large three storey house. We had the top floor to ourselves, comprising a bedsitting room for mother, a bedroom for us two girls and our own bathroom. We thought this very posh, but we were always reminded that we were there as daughters of a servant and were never allowed through the green baize door. We used the backstairs and the tradesman's entrance. The Campbells had two boys about our age but we never saw them the whole of the three months we stayed there. Mother thought life was rather easy after running a home and teaching the piano each evening. All she had to do was keep the front part of the house tidy - Hoovering, polishing, etc. and cook breakfast for the whole family, as a daily-woman was employed to do the 'rough work' as they used to call it. A Mrs. Wallis was employed to cook the family lunch and a Miss Lewis came in the evening to cook Mr. & Mrs. Campbell's evening meal. They also employed another lady who came in each afternoon to give the boys their tea and see to the ironing and mending of their clothes. Mother was always a little curious as to what was going on around her and an elderly lady used to come two or three times a week and shut herself away in a little room addressing envelopes and mother would ask us to go round the garden and peep in the window to see what she was doing. We thought this great fun, but never found out the purpose of the envelopes. As I have said Oxford was not an evacuee area, but we were allowed billet money. This Mrs. Campbell allowed mother to keep and she also paid her £2 per week, plus keeping the three of us. Once mother had helped with washing up after lunch the rest of the day was her own. She had never known such luxury!

I am not sure of the circumstances now, but after three months mother thought she would look elsewhere for employment. We then moved to a much nicer house on the other side of Oxford in the village of Hinksey. It

stood in its own grounds and seemed very grand to us. This was the home of a Mrs. Davies whose husband was fighting in the war. She had three daughters - Angela aged twelve, Helen who was eight and baby Christine, two. This was a far better place to live as we were all made to feel welcome. One of my jobs was to lay the table for Mrs. Davies' dinner, which she had served in the dining room all on her own. She taught me which table mats to lay out with each different set of china, Worcester, Derby, etc. This used to fascinate me. I still attended the same school and Mrs. Davies used to drive Kathleen into Oxford each morning to catch the bus when she took Angela to Oxford High School. One weekend Mrs. Davies visited her sister in London and mother was left in charge of the children. I thought this was lovely as I had Christine all to myself.

Well, VE day dawned at last on 8th May 1945 and we were due to return home. All this time father was at home in Sidcup although he came down two or three times to visit us in Oxford. He first went into lodgings when our house was bombed, but later made the grandmothers' flat habitable and lived there managing for himself.

Mrs. Davies did not want to lose mother and asked whether father could not find employment in Oxford and carry on as before, but, of course, my mother was anxious to get home to Sidcup. There was also my brother to consider who was still in the sanatorium as the doctor would not allow him home without anywhere to live. Father was busy trying to find us a house, through the council who were duty bound to rehouse all bombed out families. He was eventually offered a suitable house in Westbrook Road and so at the end of June we were once more back in dear old Sidcup. Whilst at St. Denise School I sat the scholarship for the technical school which I duly passed. I was due to start at Cooper's at Chislehurst in the September to undertake a two year secretarial course, but spent the last six weeks in Alma Road School before the summer break. Mrs. Davies had wanted me to stay in Oxford on my own to be employed as her nursemaid and although I have always been fond of children I thought it best to come home with all the family. Mrs. Davies wrote to mother after we arrived home asking whether she would reconsider as she now employed two girls in the house, but they were not as efficient as mother had been.

We only spent a short time in Westbrook Road which was a requisitioned house as the owners wished to return. The council then housed us in a smaller property in Halfway Street until our own house was rebuilt in Valliers Wood Road. We were able to return there in June 1946.

As I said earlier, the war to me was not too traumatic as I was young at the time and although we were sent away due to mother's illness and spent some time in Oxford, I think we fared better than some of the other children in London and other danger spots who were evacuated.

Valerie Allen

The Warning

Passing by Sidcup Police Station, I glanced up at the old air raid siren, still on top of its high pole, fifty years on, looking for all the world like a giant dumb bell on a stick.

Memories flooded across my mind, the awful howling it made signalling the approach of the German bombers, it sounded like a banshee from hell, sending people flying to their places of safety, be it an Anderson brick built shelter or the indoors Morrison type. Some had a corrugated nissen hut contraption, set half below ground level, then covered with sand bags, these horrors would frequently become water logged in damp situations.

In London the tube stations became a second home for the Cockneys and the famous Chislehurst Caves became almost a little village with shops and other facilities. Babies were even born in these caves, one such was named Cavena.

Not everyone followed the herd, the individualists all had their own bolt holes. An old lady down the lane swore by her sturdy kitchen table as a safety net. 'You can have your fancy shelters' she said, 'but that old table saw me through the 1918 war and will get me through this one.'

We in our family, proud of our independence, decided that if fate decreed that we should be blown up, we should go in comfort, windows were barricaded with blankets and wardrobes and we slept in our beds throughout the war.

I remember when one of the first land mines of the war dropped at the bottom of our garden, two hundred yards away from our bungalow in Westwood Lane. The bomb demolished six houses in Northumberland Avenue. At the time no one knew what it was, seeing the huge parachute, a dull green colour, with what looked like a large petrol drum hanging underneath.

My parents were playing cribbage in their bedroom, Mother, who had a good hand, had just said 'Hows that then' and as she put her cards down the mine landed. The windows shattered, the roof blew off and all hell let loose. Father said it was all Mother's fault. Just before this event took place I had decided to go into the kitchen and fetch our cat, Jim, in to sit with me. I had just got back into the lounge when the bomb landed, the ceiling blew down, the lampshade parted company from its moorings and floated very gracefully down, soot covered me and the cat, who took a dim view of the proceedings and showed it in no uncertain manner by leaping in the air and vanishing out of the door.

Father said 'Good Lord', Mother said 'Oh dear' and the lady next door was heard shouting 'Where are me corsets'. Pandemonium broke loose, wardens with the words 'Air Raid Warden' on the front in white, were saying 'what on earth was that'. Bits of grey/green parachute lay all around.

At the bottom of our long garden was a gap where six houses once stood, twelve people died that night.

Glass everywhere, the roof was open to the sky, tiles lay shattered on the ground and in our kitchen where I had been standing a few moments before, long splinters of glass were embedded in the walls and furniture, looking for all the world like little sparkling darts. Had I stayed a moment longer in that room, both the cat and I would have given a good impression of a pincushion. Such is fate.

We boarded up the windows and with speed gangs of men came along and the tiles were back in place and in no time. When today people remark at the multi patterned tiles on the roof, we explain why.

We decided to go to my aunts in Norbury in London. That night the Luftwaffe decided to set fire to the City. When the noise subsided and the house stopped rocking, we all climbed up to the top of the three storied house and by dint of standing on the toilet seat could see the flames around St. Paul's Cathedral. The sky was a blaze of scarlet and light - an unholy midnight sunset. My aunt said 'The bombers had followed us'. I think she knew something --- it was all our fault, of course.

It did seem odd for a couple of days later, we travelled up to Scotland to stay with Mother's sister, just outside Glasgow, and the only bombs of the war were dropped at the back of aunts house. Our fault again, it caused only slight damage. I remember seeing a standard rose tree blown up by the chimney pot of a bungalow. Aunt was thrilled by it all, but we had seen too much already.

Ricky Richardson

Recording Session

(This article should be read in conjunction with last year's Newsletter)

You may remember in last year's newsletter there was an item on the Lamorbey and Blackfen entries in the 1930 and 1938 Kellys Directories. My aim was to show the population explosion during those years. Many of you indicated that you found the article interesting and remembered some of the residents mentioned. I had hoped some members would put pen to paper on this subject, however, Mrs. Bess Dzielski, member and Blackfen Librarian and her colleague, Mrs. Eileen Kirby, went through the 1938 entries whilst I recorded their comments.

Mrs. Kirby was a mine of information having lived in the Halfway Street area whilst growing up and Mrs. Dzielski gave thumb nail sketches of some prewar residents and followed these up with memories of their sons and daughters. Many surnames and addresses were remembered from continual handling of library tickets.

The recording session was quite hilarious at times which meant that some of the interesting comments were lost amidst the laughter. Perhaps just as well as one or two remarks needed censoring. It was difficult to write an article from this recording as the information was flowing so rapidly as the ladies went down the alphabetical list.

They attacked the 1938 Residents List initially, which called to mind the doctors of the area:

Dr. Hans Abrahamson, 150 Halfway Street. A rather large Jewish gentleman - a refugee. Remembered by Mrs. Kirby saying in a shop in her presence on several occasions 'Can I have a large triangular water ice, please'.

Dr. Coates, Oaklands Avenue and **Dr. Shadwell**, Hurst Road.

Dr. Kar and his wife - both used the Library and Mrs. Kar is still hale and hearty.

Dr. Messinier of 82 Marlborough Park Avenue, also used the library (now Dr. Perkins surgery).

Dr. Thomas O'Keefe was remembered with great affection as being right out of Dr. Finlay's Casebook.

The other name known to them in this category was the **Reverend Lawrence Barrett**, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Lamorbey. Mrs. Dzielski recalled it was this cleric who was helpful in setting up the new parish of the Holy Redeemer, Days Lane, which had previously been centred around the Mission Hut in the parish of Holy Trinity. Mrs. Kirby recalled a Sunday School outing to Margate by train when the Revd. Barrett gave each child a sixpenny piece. Obviously a red letter day for her.

I would mention that not only is Mrs. Dzielski the Blackfen Librarian, but one of the hardworking Redeemer Churchwardens. One of the characters of our own time!

Then the ladies began perusing the commercial listing

Alens newsagents of 197 Days Lane - corner of Fen Grove. Name came from **Albert Peake** and **Emily Birk** who were brother and sister.

Austral Dancing School of Longlands Road was quite famous. There was a private theatre and swimming pool. Today remembered by **Austral Close** where our member Mrs. Williams lives.

A.H. Bacon - Hardware Dealer, 168 Halfway Street Road. One of those marvellous places that always smelt of paraffin and firewood.

Miss Violet Barker General Dealer (Grocer), 195 Days Lane. A very tall lady with dyed black hair - a real business woman who coped so well with the rationing. Bess's Mum registered with her, which meant that during the war the family rations had to be bought from that shop.

Bell & Sons - Butchers of 178 Halfway Street. Shop only closed this year (1989) due to the retirement of one of the sons mentioned. Another son, Peter Bell, currently plays with the Sidcup Symphony Orchestra.

Mrs. Gladys Bratton Piano Teacher, Marlborough Park Avenue. Large lady - deeply bosomed - always beautifully dressed and terribly ladylike. Very much of the 1930's.

Butcher Curnow - Chemists 121 Station Road - now **Brockies The Photographic Shop**.

Mr. Barnett Butwick - Boot & Shoe Dealer of the Oval. Large gentleman who always appeared to need a shave. Played the violin.

County Library - Blackfen Branch, Cedar Avenue (when Sidcup was Kent) - Miss J. Conlin was in fact Sidcup Librarian.

Miss Gladys Hammond - Teacher of Pianoforte of Burnt Oak Lane. I remembered her in the early 1980's attending Society Meetings with her dog when she always sat at the front in a comfortable armchair. Bess went back much further to when she ran a nursery and in fact looked after her son on a Saturday morning. Miss Hammond was well known in the musical world, having sang with the Royal Society and knew Sir Malcolm Sargeant and so on. Both she and Bess were part of an early current affairs group at Lamorbey. We all remember her wearing the green tweed coat and skull cap and in the few years before she died being an absolute menace to the traffic in the Blackfen Oval area as she poodled along in her electric invalid chair.

Lamorbey Park Residential Hotel. The ladies recalled when the hotel was sold to Kent County Council for Adult Education purposes. At the time it was not thought of as something rather special. There were some good speakers - Bess mentioned again that she was in a 'Current Affairs Group' together with Miss Hammond. Mr. Ingrams, the Principal, would be very pleased with the 'Good Conversation'. Bess was on the House Committee and also helped to set up the 'Sidcup Young Mothers Club' and a lady called Paddy Stone requested that Mr. Ingram should provide a creche.

Mrs. Kirby's father, as a local lad during the First World War, was allowed to skate on the lake (I am sure I have seen a photograph of Lamorbey Skaters).

When the hotel was sold, Mr. Phillips the Head Gardner and Mr. Burrows, Groundsman, both lost their jobs. Mr. Phillips then bought a house in Old Farm Avenue. Mrs. Kirby remembers this gentleman always wearing leather gaiters.

C.R. Leech - Builder, 214 Blackfen Road. Built much of the local area during the 30's - those roads named after trees.

Logans - Baker, 149 Station Road. Had an upstairs room that was used for Wedding Receptions. We now know it as **Sophies Choice**.

Thos. Martin - Monumental Sculptor, 146 Station Road now the section of **Eric Thomas** next to **Dunns the Florists**.

Odeon Cinema, 157 Station Road now **Lamorbey Baths**. Residents were really thrilled when it opened. All plush and mirrors etc.

Rueben Stone - Chimney Sweeper, 59 Corbylands Road. As a little girl Mrs. Kirby recalled she took a note from her Mother asking the sweep to clean their chimney.

Sundridge Laundry, 31 The Oval. One of young Bess's jobs was to take in and collect her Father's stiff collars.

and so on

I was particularly pleased with the recalling of so many memories by these ladies. It was all so spontaneous and delightful and as I have explained in no way could be classed as an interview. There must be many more long-time residents who also have memories for us to record. Do you know any of them?

As a good Librarian, Bess reminded me that a history of the Halfway Street area had been written by **Mr. Fulford** and was available at Blackfen Library.

Frances Oxley

SOCIETY NEWS

Good news has come in regarding Cyril Salisbury. He has made good progress after his heart operation, but unfortunately his wife, Marion, sustained an accident at work losing part of one of her fingers. I am sure we are all looking forward to seeing both of them attend Society meetings again

We must remember that Mrs. Mamas is now Mrs. Newey.

Congratulations to Angela and Derek Everett on their son gaining a first class degree.

Exceedingly sorry to learn from Mrs. Nash that her sight is now slightly impaired - I am sure it will not prevent her from attending meetings. She is such a marvellous trouper. We are once again in her debt for having arranged the 1989 outing to St. Albans and Shaws Corner.

Treasurer, Jack Saunders, has spent nearly three months with relatives in Canada.

Our Vice President, Mr. Hayward, was in good form when I visited he and Mrs. Hayward the other evening. Including Mr. Hayward, we now have three octogenarian members, Mrs. Booker and, of course, Mr. Alf Liverton who celebrated his 80th Birthday this year.

As a Society we have written to the Council on three occasions objecting to demolition of the Hollies Boys' Houses. It is now certain they will be retained and eventually made into flats.

CONCLUSION

The newsletter gets bigger and better! I think our wartime articles are really good and congratulate and thank the writers. Each time I read Valerie Allen's article I realised that not only is it full of war history, but of our own local history. I reiterate that the Society has so much potential within it for recording much of our recent past.

My special thanks go to committee member, Norma Huntley, for kindly typing and photocopying this newsletter.

So, a warm welcome to both new and old members to the 1989/90 Society Year.

Frances Oxley
Hon. Secretary & Editor