

It falls to me yet once more to welcome members and especially new members, to the Society's academic year of 1991/1992. In 1992 we shall celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Society's inception at Lamorbey Park. It arose from the decision of students of a history class to meet also as a Local History Society. Many of these people were intellectuals and included Dr. Bull, Mr. Brain, Mr. Evans, Mr. Nunns and Mr. Councer, who was the original class lecturer and much loved still today in Kentish history circles and a known authority on stained glass.

In our time many of you remember Beverley Nunns as the Secretary and then Chairman of the Society and due to his great knowledge of our area became known as "MR. SIDCUP". Mr. Nunns died at his home in Deal last year and further in this newsletter appears an obituary written by Dr. John Mercer, which I am sure you will appreciate. Local Studies at Hall Place have inherited all Mr. Nunns' documents, maps and artifacts referring to Sidcup. At the present time Mr. Barr Hamilton is cataloguing the material, which is proving quite a task. It is hoped that in due course this material will be available to Society members as an aid when pursuing their own local history projects. In memory of Mr. Nunns one lecture each autumn will be named the "Beverley Nunns Lecture" and we are delighted that the first one will be delivered by his widow, Mrs. Gertrude Nunns, who has herself written the definitive book on Footscray.

Today's Society members are many and various. Last year, 1990/91, the membership stood at seventy-five. Our Chairman, Miss Iris Morris, is interested in and lectures on Wilmington, near Dartford. Dr. John Mercer has written the Sidcup Story and we expect him to speak to us at least once a year on some local aspect. Our girls, Kathy Harding and Denise Baldwin (perhaps I should now refer to them as our ladies), speak to various clubs and societies on Footscray. In 1988 after the Great Storm of October 1987 we published a leaflet with pieces written by members of their personal experience of that dreadful night.

Last year members of the public were invited to Blackfen Library to reminisce on Halfway Street and Blackfen. The memories were taken down by Society members and eventually these were edited by Dr. John Mercer. A book has been produced and a great gamble has been taken by having six hundred copies printed. We shall launch the book at Blackfen Library on Tuesday, September 24th. Please buy a copy or perhaps two or three for any friends that may have moved from the neighbourhood. The reminiscences may also bring memories flooding back to them.

I started the newsletter several years ago with just two pages written by myself and it is so pleasing that it is now full of articles by many members on varying subjects. This year one or two pieces have been written highlighting the ten yearly census.

We shall be active in the Bexley Borough's Local History Fair in November. Our speaker on that occasion will be Dr. John Seymour, who has so delighted us on two Society evenings with his own family history which in the latter years was SIDCUP history.

I think that the original founding members of forty years ago would find the Society different, but be pleased that it is thriving and the concept of local history study a paramount consideration.

Frances Oxley
Editor

Census 1991

In January 1992 the Public Record Office in London will be full of people locating their ancestors from the 1891 Census.

Censuses of various sorts have been taken in England for many years, the most well-known one being the Domesday Book of 1085. Censuses in their present form have continued since 1801. These were of no great benefit or interest as they only gave headcounts of a household, no names or any other information appears to be available. Censuses have been taken every ten years since, with the exception of 1941 due to the Second World War.

The 1841 census probably gives the earliest reasonable amount of information. They tended to round off the age of the individual to the nearest 5, with no place of birth, only if they were born in or out of the County. No occupations were recorded either, not very helpful if you were hunting a stray relative.

From 1851 things improve with names, ages, occupations, place of birth and very helpfully the relationship to the head of the household. If they were farmers or tenant farmers the amount of land they farmed and their workforce would be included.

For larger towns and villages it is advisable, if at all possible, to have an address or area in order to prevent hour after hour of fruitless searching. It is never boring, frequently frustrating, fascinating reading. Other people's families can be just as interesting as your own. Be warned, it is very easy to get diverted so keep going.

I have been very lucky to have traced my Winny family, in Constable country in Suffolk since 1841. Their presence is also recorded in the Parish Registers, another invaluable source, for three hundred years. The 1861 census for Nayland in Suffolk reveals on census night there were two lodgers staying with my Winny family. They were Sarah Constable, aged 41 years, a strawplaiter and Joseph Sargeant, aged 30 years, a journeyman blacksmith. I would love to know if there was a connection there.

Some people have photocopied their 1991 census, how thoughtful for their descendants. I know one lady who planned census night in 1981 by inviting her parents, then living in Yorkshire, to stay with them and to complete their census forms with "Away from home, staying with daughter in Sevenoaks". In 1991 she had her married son, daughter-in-law and new grand-daughter from Yorkshire to stay with her on census night. In the end all she had was the baby as her parents had to stay, as an emergency measure, as - guess what! Census enumerators!

A handy tip, write everything down from your census, the folio number particularly, even if you draw a blank in that village. When you come to it again you will be reminded where you have or have not searched that is if you haven't lost the piece of paper!

Anne Brunton

Census Years from 1901 onwards recalling highlights

Researched by Eric Percival

1901

Jan	1	Commonwealth of Australia inaugurated
	22	Death of Queen Victoria
July	2	Count Von Zeppelin ascends in his airship
Sept	6	President of USA (McKinley) shot, dies eight days later

1911
 Jan 3 Sidney Street siege
 March 21 Tercentenary of authorised version of the Bible
 April 2 Census
 May 31 Titanic launched
 Aug 22 Mona Lisa stolen from the Louvre
 Nov 17 Crystal Palace sold

1921
 Jan 8 Chequers becomes official country residence for Prime Minister
 Feb 5 Death of Kitty O'Shea (of Parnell scandal), she had been a resident of Eltham
 June 6 Southwark Bridge opened
 July 22 Chu Chin Chow closes after 2,238 performances

1931
 Feb 28 Sir Oswald Mosley forms new party
 May 22 Whipsnade Zoo opened
 Aug 18 Graf Zeppelin flies from Germany to London then tours Britain
 Oct 18 Death of Thomas Edison

1941
 Jan 20 Roosevelt sworn in as US President for third time
 Jan 21 Tobruk taken
 March 4 Raid on Lofoten Islands
 April 5 South African troops take Addis Ababa
 12 Belgrade occupied by Germany
 May 11 Rudolf Hess lands in Scotland
 21 Bismark sunk
 June 22 Invasion of Russia

1951
 Festival of Britain
 Burgess and McLean defect to Russia
 Oct Churchill Prime Minister again
 First broadcast of "The Archers"

1961
 100,000 people in CND demo, Red Dean Hewlett Johnson,
 John Osborne and Vanessa Redgrave arrested
 MacMillan applies to join EEC
 Dr. Beeching becomes Chairman of British Railways
 First time in 47 years two British women in singles final at Wimbledon
 June Angela Mortimer and Christine Truman

1971
 Jan Great Postal Strike
 Decimal Currency introduced
 Digital Watches introduced
 First Body Scanner is devised
 April Space Station "Soviet Salyut" launched

1981
 Yorkshire Ripper jailed
 Cynthia Payne (the "Streatham Madam") in court
 Brixton and Toxteth riots
 Brideshead Revisited on ITV
 New Humber Bridge opened
 July 29 The Prince of Wales marries Lady Diana Spencer

1991

July 29 Mrs. Thatcher resigns as Prime Minister
10th anniversary of the wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales
Aug Queen Mother's 91st birthday
19 Coup D'État in Soviet Union
21 Coup defeated and the beginning of the end of Communism after 74 years

1991 saw a Road Transport Census in the Borough. I noticed it happening in Station Road, Sidcup and John Mercer was actually involved in one in Bexley Lane on 4th June. He summarised the incident as follows:

"Traffic going north was not stopped. Only traffic going south was stopped. Drivers were told it was a Department of Transport exercise (one policeman to see fair play, five or six departmental officers - not Bexley but central government).

Questions asked - Where going to?
Where from?
Business or social occasion?"

J.M.

Goodness knows what will come from this census. The locals know that during term time the roads are clogged during the morning peak hours due to parents taking children to school. When the school holidays come the roads are so much clearer and we travellers can actually board an almost empty bus which is normally full of youngsters. Never mind, walking to the station is good exercise.

Frances Oxley

My Jersey Ancestors

Last summer, in Jersey, I visited Samarès Manor, the family home of one of my ancestors. It was a beautiful day and as we walked across the large lawns to the long white house with its many green shuttered windows I keenly anticipated seeing the inside and gaining more information about one of the oldest Jersey families and its history. Since I was a descendant it made it all the more interesting and I have since enjoyed finding out more. But before doing the conducted tour of the house we visited the large kitchen garden with its old walls, where the long rows of hearty vegetables and salads are grown and go into the pleasant meals one can take on the terrace. The large farmyard with its stables and outbuildings lie on the other side of the house. Here you can watch the traditional Jersey Wonder being made, meet a real Jersey cow and mingle with the Manor Farm's herd of cows and goats. There are demonstrations of cheese making and floral crafts and in the centre of the farmyard is the old cider press where the apples are crushed by the large wheel taken round by the horse. On the other side of the house lie the extensive herb gardens, soaking up the sun, now enlarged and in the form of two mazes. The gardens grouped around the lakes and a long canal were very beautiful with flowering trees and bushes, many more unusual, helped by Jersey's climate. Two Australian black swans and wild ducks were on the ponds. At the head of the canal is a Japanese Summer house, garden and pagoda, all landscaped by Sir James Knott in 1924. I walked on eager to see how far the estate stretched.

In the house the rooms are rather dark with heavy furniture, family portraits on the walls and a long family tree on vellum of the Dumaresq family; and that's really where my story begins.

The Dumaresq family was one of the old Jersey families who go back to the Middle Ages. It is, I am told, now extinct. Being a small island, roughly forty five miles square, there was much inter-marriage and perhaps because of this one can trace one's ancestors more easily from records, crests and armorial shields on old houses and churches. What are known as wedding stones can still be seen on the front doors of Jersey houses. These show the initials of the bride and groom and a date, sometimes the family arms. Under Jersey laws of inheritance, a man could not leave his widow without provision. She was allowed life enjoyment of a third of all landed property, another third went to his children. This did mean that many old granite farms remained and still remain in the same family from the day they were built. The widow moved from the main house into the dower house which is often found built as an extension to the old farm.

In 1880 my grandmother, Emily le Bas, married John Payn and two old Jersey families were again united. Being proud of their ancestors they gave their children family names, as did my parents in their turn. I was named Margaret Dumaresq and my sister Philippa Payn and my brother had a family name on my father's side.

During the first World War my mother joined the VAD and came to England to nurse in Plymouth. Here she met my father. They were married in 1919 and came to live in Sidcup in 1921.

The first owners of the manor are thought to be the St. Hilaires, who held it about 1160 until the time of the Hundred Years War, when they chose to fight for the French and lost the manor. The next occupants were the Payns, who held it for nearly 200 years. A stone displaying the armorial bearings of the Dumaresqs (three scallop shells) and those of the Payns (three trefoils) were found in the grounds. This may have been carved about 1500, when Mabel Payn married Jean Dumaresq. During the English Civil War the manor was again lost when Henri Dumaresq had to flee the island.

For two years Samarès Manor was used as a prison and all the timber on the estate was cut down. It was Phillipe, Henri's son, who first created the lovely gardens by digging a canal a quarter of a mile long and planting scores of Cypresses from France and a vineyard. So through the years the manor passed through the hands of several families. Each in turn altered and modernised it, although today very little remains of the original building, only the Norman Crypt, which is now a small museum.

In 1924, it was sold to Sir James Knott, the first husband of the present owner, Mrs. Obbard. He spent an awesome £150,000 on the grounds. Today they are in the care of Mr. Vincent Obbard, Mrs. Obbard's son.

Jersey is divided into twelve parishes, each with its church and the parish of St. Clement, where the Samarès Manor lays is the smallest and the most fertile. A great part lies below high tide level and considerable erosion has taken place, large tracts of land have succumbed to the sea, as is evidenced by the forest bed which lies only a foot or so beneath the nearby beach. Centuries ago Samarès was a salt lake marsh and provided the Seigneur with a good income from its salt. The name Samarès came from salse marais, meaning salt marsh. The salt was obtained by allowing the sea to penetrate the low lying land. The channel was blocked and the water left to evaporate and a deposit of salt remained. So in the old Jersey French, the Dumaresqs were people of the marsh. As late as 1763, all who held land on the manor were compelled to make the Seigneur's hay, to fetch his wood and wine, and to clean his colombier or pigeon house. A fine 11th century example remains in the grounds of the manor. It was built without a roof and provided nesting places for over 500 pigeons. Boys were sent up to collect the eggs, a somewhat perilous task, and on one occasion one fell and was killed. The early Seigneurs also claimed the right to keep a gallows. This meant the Seigneur not only had the right to hang any malefactor on his own gallows, but also to pocket his goods and property as

well. These rights were strongly defended even as late as 1695. He was also allowed to keep a warren, keep hawks and claim shipwrecks. To these perks were added the right of being conveyed by his tenants to any of the four Norman ports whenever he wanted a free trip to France. No wonder one early Seigneur was summoned to the Court of Common Pleas to explain why he was behaving as if he were King! There was also a special bonus to his Dame if she had had a child. It was the Rector of St. Clement's job to provide a white horse on which to ride to church for her thanksgiving service.

The church of St. Clements was originally a tiny Norman Chapel. In the 15th century it was considerably enlarged and today has some interesting frescoes, discovered in 1879, church silver, a font that is a fine specimen of sculptured granite and a fine clock. On the outside of the south wall a rectangular granite slab was inserted to the memory of Jean Dumaresq. It dates from 1597 and records the death of Jean Dumaresq and his wife Ester (Lady of Samarès). There are armorial bearings of the Payns and Dumaresqs and related families.

In 1852, when Victor Hugo came to Jersey he lived in the parish of St. Clement for three years.

After our tour of the house, we the public, were asked to wait as Mrs. Obbard was coming downstairs to walk her dog. The dog evidently did not like seeing so many strangers on his territory! Later coming out of the farmyard I met Mrs. Obbard and made myself known to her. We had a long chat, in which she mentioned the work her first husband had done on the estate and how she had stood up to the Germans during the Occupation, when I gather they'd like to have taken over the manor. They didn't and she lived there with an elderly companion throughout the war years. This visit was certainly the highlight of my holiday. I have always felt fortunate in having a Jersey mother and grandmother. Sadly my grandfather died before I was born. We were welcomed every summer for the many, many visits we made both pre-war and post-war. These lovely holidays are full of happy memories and a certain pride of this my dear Island.

Margaret White
June 1991

Society Outing to Guildford and Clandon Park 1990

The morning of our outing on May 12th 1990 was spent in Guildford. Whether by rail or by road the approach to Guildford is dominated by the sight of the Cathedral on Stag Hill, a site of 6 acres given by Richard, 5th Earl of Onslow.

We had a short stop at the Cathedral Coffee Shop before Friends of the Cathedral gave us an hour's tour of the building. After a competition in 1932, Mr. (now Sir) Edward Maufe's design was chosen (the estimated price of building being £250,000). Archbishop Dr. Cosmo Gordon Lang laid the foundation stone in 1936 and the building of the East end went ahead until 1939, when it came to a standstill. It was 1952 before a licence was granted to continue, and the almost completed Cathedral was consecrated in 1963.

Inside there is an uninterrupted view of the high altar, with no screens, as there are in Cathedrals based on monastic ideas. Looking up, our attention was drawn to so much history and interest in the windows, and then down below was pointed out the wonderful array of tapestry kneelers worked by hundreds of members of the Diocese.

The lunch period was spent in the town. It has much to show in ancient buildings, the colourful castle gardens and museum, or the quiet walk by the River Wey. Lewis Carroll fans

come from as far away as Japan to visit his grave below the Hog's Back, or to look at the plaque on The Chestnuts, his sister's house, where he died.

A short drive after lunch took us to Clandon Park, the home of the Onslow family since 1641. The present house, built about 1731, unlike the usual Early Georgian house, was designed by a Venetian architect, Giacomo Leoni.

Many of the Onslows followed political careers, with three members having been speakers of the House of Commons. The 4th Earl was Governor-General of New Zealand in 1889-92, and brought back the Maori House seen across the lawn. There is also the remains of a grotto which may be a folly contemporary with the house.

In 1941 Clandon Park was used by the Public Record office for storage. When the 6th Lord Onslow and his wife were able to move back into the house after the War, they carried out some modernisation, but found after five years that they could no longer afford to live there and moved into a smaller house in the park. His aunt, the Countess of Iveagh and wife of Rupert Guinness, bought the house and seven acres of land and gave them to the National Trust. Much of the contents had already been sold, but a bequest by Mrs. David Gubbay of a fine private collection of C18th English furniture and English and Continental porcelain, together with a generous gift from Mr. Ken Levy, enabled the Trust between 1968-70 to restore and furnish Clandon as a great C18th house.

Before leaving the house, we found welcome refreshment in the basement kitchens, part of which are preserved in the original manner, complete with list of rules for the servants! There was additional interest in the Queen's Royal Surrey Regimental Museum, and an opportunity to purchase reminders of the visit from the National Trust Shop.

Variation on the homeward journey was provided by a detour across Putney Bridge and along Chelsea Embankment, before returning S.E. via the Elephant and Castle and the Old Kent Road.

To all who made the visit possible, thank you for an interesting day!

Jennie Dakin

A visit from the Mayor of Bexley

In January 1991 the Mayor, Cllr. Graham Holland visited the Society, together with his Mace-Bearer, Dennis Edwards. They brought the Mayoral robes and regalia and explained their use.

The Mace-Bearer's function was to walk before the Mayor to protect him from assaults by the mob! The mace, designed by Arthur Styles, weighs between seven and eight kilos, has an apse-shaped head and bears both the Royal Coat of Arms and the Bexley Arms.

Bexley first became a Borough in 1937 when the Mayor was installed under the Charter Oak in Danson Park. The present London Borough was inaugurated in 1965, and included also Erith, Crayford and Sidcup.

In the sleeve of the Mayor's fur-lined robes is a concealed pocket, making easy access to the scroll of his speeches. The origin of his Jabot, a lace cravat was to act as a bib at dinner and his lace-cuffs were scented to eliminate the smells of the street! If a gentleman is in office as Mayor he wears a cocked hat, but when a Lady Mayor is in office she wears a tricorne. The Mayoral chain is gold, in a modern design of a spiked sun.

The current Bexley Arms contain parts of three of the constituent boroughs and includes the White Horse of Kent, the Eardley Stags of Upper Belvedere, four oak trees and three wavy lines depicting the Rivers Thames, Cray and Shuttle, and a cog-wheel to represent industry. The motto is Boldly and Rightly.

The Mayor himself talked of his official activities, explaining the procedures of election, and the functions of the various political parties in council procedure. As well as being the Chairman of all council meetings he is the Borough's first citizen, and represents Bexley residents at such functions as the Service in Westminster Abbey attended by all the London Mayors and a service at St. Pauls to commemorate the blitz, and in honour of the London Fire Brigade.

This year the fund-raising of the Mayor's charity has gone to handicapped people, and Cllr. Holland also joined in a wheel-chair outing to find how convenient or otherwise were shopping facilities for them.

Among other activities this year he has presented the Royal Artillery with the Freedom of the Borough, encouraged visits by schools to the Mayor's Parlour and visited local organisations and residents widely during his year of office.

Altogether, a most enjoyable and enlightening visit by the Mayor and his Mace-Bearer!

Elizabeth Fleet

Visit to the National Postal Museum

On 21st January 1991 a group of twenty-five members set off from Sidcup Station to visit the National Postal Museum. It was a cold day and our journey was more exciting than expected as London Transport had cut out an advertised bus. However, nothing unites a group more than a good discussion on the iniquities of London's transport system, and we were all very cheerful when we arrived at the museum.

The decision to make a group visit to the National Postal Museum had arisen from Mrs. Shotton's talk to the Society on the history and development of letterboxes. We had seen such a variety of letterboxes on slides, that we were keen to see some of them "in the flesh". However, we were also fortunate in that our visit to the museum coincided with an exhibition on postal reform and the Penny Black. The Royal Mail had been opened to public use in 1635, but a national post developed in a haphazard fashion. Generally, there was no mechanism for the sender to pay for a letter to be sent. This was particularly hard on the poor, who might have to refuse to accept a letter which was of some importance to them. However, it was not social justice that led to a reform of the postal service, but the need for an increase in government revenue following the Napoleonic Wars. Roland Hill spearheaded the many calls for reform, arguing that a very cheap uniform postage would encourage greater use of the postal services and bring in more money. We saw displays of correspondence sent at various rates in different parts of the country prior to Roland Hill's reforms. We also saw entries to the competition which the Treasury launched in 1839 to find the best from the many different styles of stamp. There were all sorts of different designs - many using the "stamp" on the back of the envelope to hold the envelope closed.

The security was very tight in the very modern part of the museum that housed the stamp collection. The highlight of the collection was, of course, the pages of "Penny Blacks". These apparently were priceless, BUT don't get into a lather if you come across a Penny Black. We were told that some are not especially valuable. It is the whole sheets - and particularly the unperforated sheets of the first issues - that are of such value.

On arriving at the museum our party had been divided into two halves - one half went first to the letterbox section; the other went first to the stamps. To find the letterboxes we went "uphill and downdale" within this vast building (which also housed the busy sorting office) until at last we found the letterboxes all crammed into a little room, with a wide variety of post office bikes through the ages hanging on the wall. The museum staff were very apologetic, stressing their need for funding to display the letterboxes in keeping with their historic and environmental importance. Of course, we agreed with the staff, but there was something rather special in going up and down these uneven corridors, avoiding packing cases and trolleys, and finding this Aladdin's cave of treasure.

There were many different designs of Penfolds; an Edward VIII letterbox; a very ornate one called a Beefeater; Scottish pillarboxes without the Royal Cypher and the very modern plastic ones. I can't list all the delights we saw, these are just a few that stick in my mind. There was time when if a local postmaster wanted a letterbox - wallmounted or free-standing - he just got a local firm to design and make one. We were very enthusiastic in our interest, and the staff were continually moving letterboxes to allow us further into the room to admire the variety of styles. In view of the diversity of apertures in an effort to find a design which kept the interiors of the letterboxes free from damp and the consequent slugs, it had been amusing when touring the exhibition on postal reform to see an envelope marked "Stamp eaten by snails. No charge to be made."

We had our lunch all together with the museum staff. (We had wine and a very good buffet selection!). This added to the success of the visit as we had a chance to question the museum staff on aspects we had found particularly interesting.

And then we were allowed to use the precious wooden stamps! I left the museum clutching a postcard showing a photograph of the Penny Black. On the reverse I had stamped "Lahssa 10 Au C4". "Wembley Exhibition, Wembley Park 1925" and "Chislehurst 2py Paid".

Many thanks to Norma and her assistant Frances for getting us there and back and doing all the worrying about transport for us.

Janet Woods

Visit to Morden College

Thursday, 7th February 1991 dawned dark, snowy and miserable, this was the day that the Society members were due to visit Morden College, Blackheath. By mid morning the snow had stopped having deposited about nine inches over the roads. Telephone contact between those who had planned to go by car resulted in a decision to go. After slipping and sliding across Blackheath the motorised division arrived and carefully parked on the top of a hill to ensure a skid free departure. We were met by the Admin. Officer who, after giving us a short history of the founding of the college, started showing us around. The original buildings of Morden College were designed by Wren and are truly magnificent, built 1695 to 1700 by Sir John Morden to house "elderly and decayed merchants". The motorised division had completed a tour of the Chapel when our guide was told that two ladies had arrived on foot. Frances and Norma had met at London Bridge station and taken the train to Greenwich, where they thought that a taxi would be available to take them to the College, however, no driver was willing to risk the drive up the hill to Blackheath, so our brave duo walked through the snow to join the rest of the party. The tour continued with visits to the dining room and the library. We were told that the intentions of Sir John to provide homes for unfortunate merchants was now loosely interpreted, and now includes anyone who was engaged in wholesale trading or self-employment, one current resident is a composer.

The College has over recent years greatly expanded having built satellite homes in Charlton village and another one is under construction in Beckenham. In addition to the able-bodied accommodation, there is, at Blackheath, a large hospital for use by the less fit. The visit ended with tea in the Library, and following our thanks to our host, the pedestrians and motorists joined forces and made our way home through the slush.

A most enjoyable afternoon out combining an interesting visit with a schoolchild's delight of playing in the snow.

Eric Percival

Visit to Chatham Historic Dockyard

On a very wet and windy Saturday, 25th March 1991, a very merry gathering of members and friends met at Lamorbey Baths to board the coach for a short journey to Chatham Historic Dockyard. The weather gradually worsened as we travelled along the A2, but within the hour we arrived at our destination.

We were met by Mr. Towsey, the Lecturer and Official Guide, who had given the Society a very interesting talk the previous term to whet our appetites for the visit. It was pleasing to see our name on the notice board as one of the parties visiting that day and after receiving our tickets we all adjourned to the Wheelwrights Shop to refresh ourselves with a much needed cup of hot coffee before commencing our tour.

As it was so wet we took the coach across to the Ropery noting the various buildings as we went. This, of course, as the name implies, is where all the rope was made for use on the ships that used to be built in the dockyard, dating back to the time of Henry VIII. This is a vast building and we were amazed at the length of it. Mr. Towsey explained the procedure whereby the rope is now produced using machinery. Originally the women used to walk the length of the Ropery twisting the sisal as they progressed - thus producing the rope at the end of the session. This process is where the name Rope Walks originated, which can still be found in some ancient towns and cities. There is one such in nearby Woolwich. The rope is put on to two hooks then attached to the machines which gradually move along the rope walk. The finished rope then returns on an overhead series of pulleys. The rope walk itself is half-a-mile long. We were taken to see the rope tested to a weight of one-and-a-half tons. We had a little bet as to the weight at which it would snap. It eventually broke at two tons. One of the children with us, Ian Brunton, won and was given a length of rope as a souvenir.

Our next port of call was to the Sail and Colour Loft where nowadays they still employ women to make flags and banners which are exported all over the world. Royal Standards are also made here as is polyester bunting. In Nelson's time everything would have been made of wool. We saw a 1902 photograph displayed on the wall and it looked very little different to today's building. Since 1983 this manufacture has been run on a commercial basis. As well as making sails they also make all types of merchandise from canvas, ie canopies, awnings, bags, tarpaulins etc. Sailmakers were employed here since 1757 at the start of the Seven Years' War.

When we left the Sail Loft we were shown the George III Officers' Houses and wall garden. They are in process of restoration, but unfortunately are not presently open to the public. The Pay Office was built in 1808. Charles Dickens' father lived there and was employed in the Pay Office from 1817-1823.

The Saw Mills where the work was originally all done by hard manual labour had been converted to mechanisation in 1812 by Mark Brunel, one of the famous Brunel family. It was

here, in fact, that a steam railway was built for use in the dockyard which led to the later development into public railways across the land.

After an excellent lunch partaken in the Wheelwright's shop we split into two groups to take the main tour of the day - the Wooden Walls Exhibition. This consisted of a walk back to yesteryear where we listened to the tale, as related by a young lad of 15 who started as an apprentice in 1758 helping to build the HMS Valiant, later used in the Seven Years' War between England and France. It was very well depicted and gave one a feel and idea of what it must have been like working in the dockyard all those years ago. There was a replica of the Valiant and it took 3,800 trees to make the one ship. No wonder we are trying to preserve the forests today.

We spent the remainder of the afternoon looking round the craft shops, but unfortunately being early in the season most of them were closed.

All in all it was a very enjoyable day despite the weather. But then that never puts off the hardy souls of the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society.

Valerie Allen

Annual Outing to Sandwich on 18th May 1991

Members of the Society assembled clad in suitable wear after what had been a depressing week's weather and left Lamorbey Baths promptly at 8.30am for the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society's annual outing - this year to Sandwich. No sooner was the coach heading down the A2 when the Secretary, in her indefatigable manner, was distributing tutorial information to members to ensure that they were armed with the necessary information before arriving. I think it was the Duke of Wellington who said that reconnaissance was nine-tenths of victory, and so it proved to be. The preliminary reconnaissance by Norma and Frances previously undoubtedly ensured the success of the outing.

Our first stop was on the outskirts of Sandwich, where we visited the White Mill, which is in the process of restoration. When we arrived we found that we had left the cooler weather behind and were able to abandon our overcoats and enjoy the unexpected sunshine. Our hosts had very kindly turned up in force to provide much needed refreshment. They had also erected temporary toilet accommodation (Gentlemen). Members were fortunate in having the Mill to themselves, and we split into small groups in order to make a full study both of the Mill and its history, and to see restoration work which has been carried out under the guidance of Mr. Vincent Pargeter. There was undoubtedly something to interest everybody. Those who were interested in the design and construction of the Mill had the advantage of a fascinating visit under the guidance of Mr. Barber and Mr. Harlow, who were thoroughly immersed in their subject and explained all the details of milling. We learnt at first-hand of the importance of the miller's thumb as quoted by Chaucer. The miller, by feeling the flour, could adjust his millstone as he felt necessary. This was the ultimate quality control. However, to assist him in this work, he had an array of devices devised by millwrights, and the details of the workings of these fittings, such as the regulators for adjusting the space between mill stones, were thoroughly explained and demonstrated during the tour. We also learnt about the dressing of millstones and the details of the stones used to grind various types of grain. The consensus of opinion was that it was the best description of windmill operation that we had ever heard or were ever likely to hear. They also talked about the family that operated the Mill, and the day to day operation of the Mill. It was generally agreed that had the weather been inclement it would have been a tight fit to get our Society into the mill cottage. However, it was interesting to note that the miller and his wife had raised thirteen children in this cottage.

We then moved on to Sandwich proper when, arriving at the Guildhall, we were left to our own devices until 2.15pm when we met guides from the Sandwich Local History Society for the tour around Sandwich. We each had our handout and map showing interesting things to see, and this really did pay off because most people were able to wander around on their own quite happily and get their own "feel" of Sandwich before adjourning for lunch.

However, it was interesting to note that, despite the excellence of the map, groups were still meeting each other head-on when looking for a particular place, and it was explained to us later on that, as a general rule, if you keep turning left in most towns you will come back to the place you started at, but in Sandwich you have to turn left, left, right to get back to your original position.

At the Guildhall at 2.15pm, we split into groups for our guided tour. Sandwich is the premier Cinque Port. It is difficult now to appreciate the importance of Sandwich in the Middle Ages, but again, thanks to the information given before we arrived, we had a taste of what to expect, and although it is difficult to imagine the splendours of the visits of the Venetian fleet and the accompanying visits of the Court on those occasions, it was apparent even on a cursory look that before the silting of the river Sandwich had been the major port in England, and only the silting resulted in the fishing village of Southampton being developed as a port.

The guides obviously filled in the details of Queen Elizabeth's visit and the petition by the Town Council with the presentation of a cup to persuade the Queen to take action to save the harbour. Our guide made it quite clear that if he had been around at the time he could have assured them in advance that they weren't going to get anywhere - cup or no cup - and that the cost of the four days of the Queen's visit would not achieve any results.

He told us of Sandwich's "mystery port" in the First World War when the navy had cleared the harbour to provide massive transport facilities at Stonar for convoys going to France, with accompanying roll-on, roll-off ferries for lorries and railway wagons. However, in 1919 this was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

Under his expert eye we visited the Quays and saw the warehouses and old cobbled streets. At this point the road pattern began to make more sense. All the roads lead away from the strand, although our guide had pointed out that the locals all claim that the town was designed so that when the French invaded as they frequently did - the defenders could retreat down one street then catch the French unawares in the rear.

As the afternoon wore on it became colder and at 4.15pm we adjourned to the tea rooms where Norma and Frances had ordered a magnificent tea; with very helpful, friendly staff; and plenty of hot water and milk for that extra cup. Within a short time the party were completely warm and rested. This provided a fitting climax to what had been a most fascinating and informative visit carried out with the benefit of some unexpected but welcome sunshine.

Brian Woods

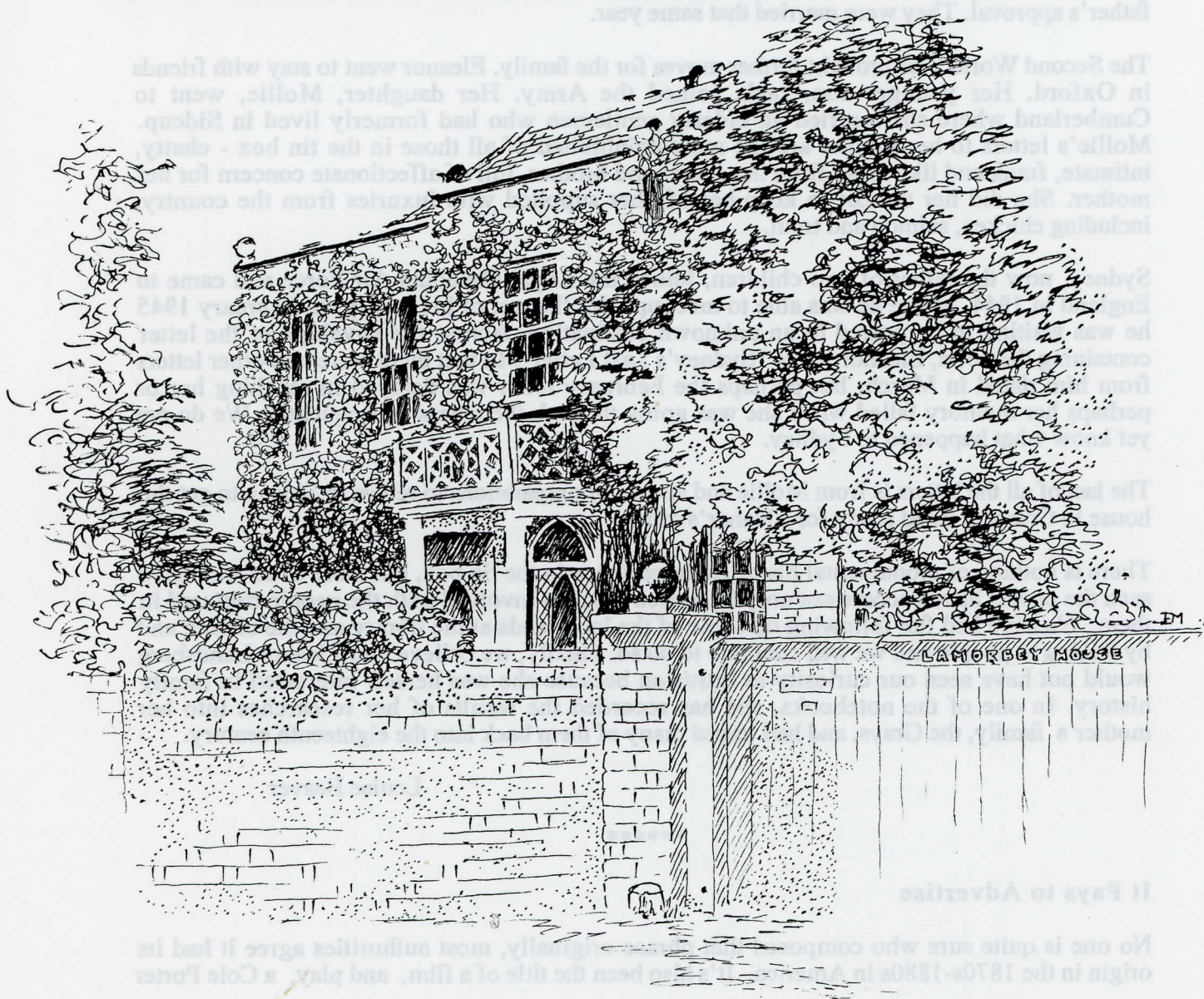
**As promised last year, this is the full story of:
THE TIN BOX**

The old metal deed box was found abandoned in a garden shed behind an empty house in Manor Road, Sidcup. The box, stoutly made with a tightly fitting lid so that although the black paint had rusted, the contents had been kept in good condition. Some members of the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society had the opportunity of browsing through the contents and have carried out further research to fill in some of the gaps in the story told by the "tin box" as we call it.

The tin box was filled with papers comprising a few official documents (birth certificate, passport, two school reports etc.), a number of photographs of people and places, many receipts, press cuttings, notebooks and over two hundred letters. None of the papers are very old, the earliest being dated 1889, but they reflect the life of a middle-class Sidcup family during dramatic social, economic and political changes in the first half of the twentieth century. The last of the letters is dated May 1945.

The papers belonged to Mrs. Eleanor Gray Landsberg (née Kitson) who moved to Sidcup on her marriage in 1899. She was then twenty-one years old. Her husband, Karl Ernest Landsberg (born 1871) was already an international businessman and he became export manager to Colman's of Norwich in 1901. During his travels throughout the world, Karl and Eleanor wrote frequently and at length to each other. One of the earliest letters preserved gives Karl's comments from Moscow on the relief of Ladysmith in 1900.

In 1911, Karl Landsberg bought the lease of Lamorbey House in Halfway Street. It was also known as Halfway Street House and the Manor House, Lamorbey. The prospectus for the sale described it as "a delightful old manor house in about 1 3/4 acres" and the photographs in Hall Place library bear this out. The house was demolished in the early nineteen thirties to make way for the Drill Hall, now the British Telecom depot.



Eleanor Landsberg was clearly fond of fine furniture and furnishings and, being a careful housewife, kept records of her purchases from local dealers and major London stores.

We do not know how the Landsbergs coped with the 1914-18 War, but an elderly Sidcup resident has said that the family had some difficulties because of their German name. Karl continued to work for Colmans and, in 1927, his eldest son, Sydney, also joined the company. In January 1929, Karl died after a short illness. There was a flood of letters of condolence from friends and business contacts throughout the world. He was obviously a well-liked and respected man. He was buried in St. John's Churchyard alongside his mother. Apart from the shock of his sudden death, Eleanor was faced with a financial crisis. There was only a small pension in place of Karl's salary and the Depression had severely reduced her income from stocks and shares. Almost immediately, she was forced to sell many of her prize possessions and then to leave Lamorbey House. After a short spell in Chislehurst, she moved into a house in Crescent Road, Sidcup.

Sydney meanwhile was consolidating his position in Colmans and he took up permanent residence in Canada as their representative. As had his father, Sydney wrote long letters at every possible opportunity, from ships, trains and hotels all over Canada. In 1932 he met and courted the daughter of a publishing magnate and his letters describe his efforts to win her father's approval. They were married that same year.

The Second World War brought further moves for the family. Eleanor went to stay with friends in Oxford. Her younger son, Jack, joined the Army. Her daughter, Mollie, went to Cumberland where she married an elderly gentleman who had formerly lived in Sidcup. Mollie's letters to her mother are the most uninhibited of all those in the tin box - chatty, intimate, frank and like those from her father and brother, full of affectionate concern for her mother. She did her utmost to keep her Mother supplied with luxuries from the country, including chicken, salmon and trout.

Sydney, now the father of two children, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and came to England in 1944, where he was able to meet up with the rest of his family. In February 1945 he was waiting to be posted to an unknown destination. Across the envelope of the letter containing the news, Eleanor wrote "Sydney's Last Letter". In fact there were two other letters from him dated in March, but perhaps the February letter was delayed in reaching her or perhaps her memory failed when she was going through the letters subsequently. We do not yet know what happened to Sydney.

The last of all the letters is from Mollie and speaks of preparations to return to Sidcup to get the house in Crescent Road ready for Eleanor's return.

There is nothing of monumental historical importance in the tin box, but those of us who have seen the papers have become not only interested but also involved with the people captured in them. We have had fun following up some of the loose ends at the library and the church and by talking to people and we will continue to do so. Finally, we believe that Eleanor Landsberg would not have seen our curiosity as intrusion because she was herself interested in family history. In one of the notebooks, she has recorded the results of her researches into her mother's family, the Grays, and had traced many of them back into the eighteenth century.

Louise Beaver

It Pays to Advertise

No one is quite sure who composed that phrase originally, most authorities agree it had its origin in the 1870s-1880s in America. It's also been the title of a film, and play, a Cole Porter

song and it reached its zenith as an American proverb, viz:

The codfish lays ten thousand eggs,
The homely hen lays one,
The codfish never cackles
To tell you what she's done.
And so we scorn the codfish
While the humble hen we prize,
Which only goes to show you
That it pays to advertise!

Now, what on earth, I hear you saying has this doggerel got to do with the erudite transactions of the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society? Well, not a lot, really, except that it seemed a good way of starting this article.

The subject of getting ourselves better known first came up at a committee meeting when our secretary was pointing out that 1992 would see the fortieth anniversary of the Society's founding. Discussion followed as to how we might celebrate the occasion. Suggestions ranged round exhibitions, displays, formal dinners, a Society history, photograph of all members, a day out, and in the course of all this, one naive voice said "Well, oughtn't we to let Sidcup know" - or something to that effect. "What a good idea," said Frances "Get on with it, Bess". It's a technique I have myself employed in other arenas and it's known as being hoist with one's own petard.

Accordingly I armed myself with some of our new impressively headed notepaper and importuned the local press with varying success. Sometimes what I wrote was printed verbatim, more often it was "edited", but by now the Kentish Times accords us a place in its "Clubs" column.

The "freebies" treat us less respectfully. John Mercer has been recorded as speaking on Historial (their spelling) novels and Ray Jones was said to have shown us arms and armour. A letter to the Mercury commenting on its series "The Time, The Place" and mentioning our next project on Sidcup reminiscences led to an enthusiastic phone call from a reporter anxious to do a feature on us. Doubtless, members will have seen the result - a photograph labelled "Eager" wherein Iris Morris and John Seymour look reasonably happy, but Frances Oxley somewhat wary. Perhaps she looks so because the Mercury in giving publicity to our proposed compilation of Sidcup memories has appropriated the idea for themselves and asked that material be sent to them first and then to be forwarded to us!

That's our progress to date in the cause of publicity for the Society. And as Somebody or Other said: "It doesn't matter what they say about you as long as they spell the name right."

Bess Dzielski

Observations from a talk given to the Society by Dr. John Seymour on A Local Family 1823-1943

The tracing of one's family history can lead into many byways, as was shown in this talk. For instance, the first recorded Seymour in this story (Bridport 1337) was a Hayward, and a little research revealed that he was responsible to the Parish for keeping the fences and enclosures in good repair. A long way was travelled by a wide variety of transport - stagecoach, train, bicycle and ships of several kinds, including one which still exists as a hulk in Port Stanley, Falkland Islands. It also led to the study of methods used to ride a penny-farthing bicycle!

When researching family history, the Census Returns play an important part and are in themselves of considerable interest, revealing how some members of the family met and married, through living in nearby streets, or fathers working in similar trades. It also has proved interesting to find how much census forms have changed - the years 1851 to 1881 used in this research can each be written on a single sheet of paper, listing name, status (head of household, married etc.) each relative in the house, down to the servants, their age, occupation and place of birth. This is somewhat different from the present form, issued this year (1991) - eight pages (or was it more?) listing everything including education, qualifications, colour, race and creed! Nevertheless, it becomes obvious when studying these forms how important these facts are in presenting an overall impression of the population. The Census can throw an amusing light on the statements of age - one lady had reduced her age by seven years! - so certain aspects of these forms should be taken with a pinch of salt!

Slides made from old photographs showed interesting comparisons in Sidcup from the 1900's to the present day. One showing Claud Beater in 1924 standing outside No.14 Station Road with his Ford car Henry IVth, particularly stressed the change in traffic conditions - one could not park there now, let alone stand in the middle of the road at leisure, taking a snapshot! Another sidelight showed photos of the late Canon Basil Spurgin of St. John's Church, as a happy family man, rather different from his public persona as a fairly stern and intellectual parson.

A very touching item was the story of Louisa Sharp, Nannie Sharp to the Beater family (born in Bromley in 1838), who looked after the children and served the family all her life, was cared for by them, and eventually was buried in the same grave in St. John's churchyard. A welcome visitor to the Society for this talk was Mrs. Margaret Downie (née Bunting), granddaughter of Orlando and Katherine Beater, who has shared with us her memories of the family (and of Nannie Sharp), and who provided some of the family photographs.

An interesting connection emerged, in later discussion, between the rope-makers of Bridport and modern Sidcup. The firm of Suttons, late of Belton Road, were taken over by Grundy's of Bridport, who also took over the Seymour rope and netmaking business.

The talk presented a rich tapestry of the past in the family history of the Spurgins, Beaters and Seymours long resident in Sidcup, and has provided some surprising links with the present - getting to know the Alderman family of 16 Crescent Road, which enabled us to re-visit the house of the Seymour grandparents, and finding that a member of the Society (Angela Everett) is connected with Tolleshunt Major, Essex - her grandparents were married in the church of St. Nicholas, possibly by Orlando Beater.

We have had many interesting discussions of the part in Sidcup, both with Mrs. Downie and with Mrs. Mary Turnbull, daughter of Canon Spurgin, and have also found that we have stirred the memories of several members of the Society as a result of this talk.

Joan Seymour
(Mrs. John Seymour)

A Memorial to Beverley Nuns

I first met Beverley Nunns in 1960 when I joined the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society. We used to meet in the Art Room (destroyed by fire recently) and the roof leaked when it rained heavily which it always seemed to do on the night of our meetings. Mr. Evans was the secretary then (I cannot remember his Christian name), a bluff, pipe smoking civil servant. But Mr. Nunns was the dominant figure. He always wore a blue suit and rode a bicycle (often a ladies' model), but whatever the weather he never deigned to wear an overcoat.

He was witty, often sarcastic, when telling of the foibles of local personalities that he had discovered in his pursuit of Sidcup history. His sharpest shafts of wit were directed at the local council and what seemed to him the perverse way that local government went about its business. How he would have loved to comment on the contemporary story of Danson Mansion!

His reading and collection of memorabilia concerning Sidcup was prodigious. His front room (and possibly attic space) at 12 Crescent Road was filled with papers, maps, objects, photographs, slides and dust. He hoped one day to produce a history book, but he never did. His wife, Gertrude, wrote the history of Footscray from his papers when they had retired to Deal. I wrote "The Sidcup Story" very largely from material that Beverley had pioneered. But if he did not write a book, he certainly wrote many articles which can be found in the Local Studies Department at Hall Place. All of them are written with meticulous accuracy for the truth and all are full of fascinating local detail.

I left the Society for some years as my work took me from a local secondary school to North London and I could no longer find the time to attend regularly on a Wednesday evening. But I still kept in touch with Beverley and from time to time he would send me little notes about some local event that he knew I was interested in. I have many of these notes on file.

In 1971 the old Ursula Lodges was about to be pulled down to make way for the present building. While exploring the semi-ruin I came across a partly finished tombstone. I telephoned Beverley and he arrived on his cycle the next evening and we struggled to lift the stone over the brick wall into Eynswood Drive where I live. With the help of a wheel barrow we trundled the stone into my garden where it remained until three years ago when I broke it up to provide some hard core for a new driveway. It had been a stone intended for one of the Berens family, but it only had some initials on it. We reported it to the Sidcup Housing Association that took over the running of Ursula Lodges, but apart from thanking us for showing an interest in the old building it was not wanted. Who wants an old tombstone indeed? Only local history buffs like Beverley Nunns and my garden was far more suitable than his front room!

As a boy he lived at "Fair Oaks" in Knoll Road and attended Merton Court School just across the road. I do not know how he acquired such an interest in local history, but it was the driving force in his life. Nothing was too small to be recorded, nothing was too much trouble to be researched. He spent his lunch hours year after year in the Public Record Office or the Guildhall Museum or the British Museum.

I last saw him on the outing to Deal in 1988. He had aged but still showed his old vigour in conducting his half of the party around the town. Those who knew him will never forget him and I am greatly indebted to him as a role model for a local historian.

John Mercer

Eileen Kirby
1925-1991

Members will have heard with great regret of the death of Eileen Kirby in March this year.

Eileen was a real Sedcopian - born in the old Wingfield Place, a row of small houses which stood at the rear of the new Wingfield Place Homes now in Halfway Street. Her entire life was spent in Sidcup and her knowledge of the district and its residents was quite remarkable.

For many years she and her husband Joe ran the confectioners and newsagents near Sidcup Station, later she worked in Shiers in Halfway Street. Her friendly manner and genuine interest in others gave a knowledge and insight into so many people.

In 1973 she joined the staff of Blackfen Library as a part-time assistant and quickly became one of the most valued members of staff. Readers enjoyed her welcoming presence and she was a firm favourite with the junior borrowers - so much so that eventually she became responsible for the day to day running of the junior library, took the weekly story-hour and was involved in all the holiday extension activities.

For years she was a regular attendant at Local History Society meetings, and latterly took part in some projects. When Frances Oxley obtained information from a pre-war Kelly's Directory of Kent, Eileen and the writer spent an hilarious and - according to Frances - libellous recording session reminiscing over her shop customers and my library readers. During her illness, which began almost with her retirement, we planned to compile a biographical index of Sidcup residents - Eileen would supply the information from her boundless memories and I would assemble the material and make the index. But, alas this wasn't to come to fruition; with her death we have lost a mine of local knowledge and expertise and this offers a lesson in the need to recall and record local memories before they disappear.

Eileen's interests were various; she was a loving gardener, an accomplished craftswoman in many kinds of handiwork, a passionate collector of owl models and a determined cyclist. Joe, her husband, died a few years ago after a stroke through which she nursed him devotedly, but she was supported with great love and care by her two daughters, Christine and Sue.

We shall all miss her very much indeed.

Bess Dzielski

Brian Newey

It was with great sadness we heard of the death on 28th August of our member Brian Newey. Our thoughts are with Freya and the family at this time.

Frances Oxley

Proposed Outing for 1991

It is proposed that our Annual Outing in May 1992 will be to Bodiam Castle and Rye. Details will be available early next year. It is also hoped that we will be able to visit the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood and the Jeffrye Museum in October/November this year previously cancelled due to renovation at the Jeffrye Museum.

40th Anniversary Celebration 1992

As Bess Dzielski has intimated in her article, many suggestions have come forward from committee members for celebrating this Anniversary. It is felt that a formal dinner would be the ideal for us, therefore Frances and I are looking into this and will put forward suggestions during the Autumn term.

Membership views on any other form of celebration would be most welcome, please let me know.

Norma Huntley

Society News

News has been coming through of various members who have been or are ill - our good wishes go to them all for a speedy recovery.

After Irene Pope's sad loss of her husband I was pleased to see in the local paper a report and photograph of the wedding of her daughter Lindsey to Michael Jones. It was lovely to see such a happy couple and we wish them well.

Gwen Dudney participated in the 90th Birthday tribute to the Queen Mother at Horse Guards Parade. Gwen promised that she will sometime relate this experience to us.

Bess Dzielski accompanied Lady Wallace and was present in the House of Lords for the Autumn 1990 State Opening of Parliament. Again we hope Bess will share her experience with us at some future date.

Norma and I were present in the precincts of Windsor Castle to watch the 1991 Garter Procession. The King of Belgium was made a Knight of the Garter. It's always pleasant to spot Mr. Sedley Andrus, Albany Herald in the procession as he spoke to the Society a few years ago.

The drawing on page 13 of Lamorbey House, Halfway Street (now site of Telephone Exchange) was done by our Chairman, Iris Morris. All the illustrations in our forthcoming book "Blackfen and Halfway Street Reminiscences" are her work as, of course, is the cover of this Newsletter. She hopes to produce sets of notelets from these drawings for the Society to sell. We are indeed fortunate in having such a talented Chairman.

My thanks to all the contributors to this newsletter and as usual my very special thanks to Norma Huntley for the production of it.

I hope you all enjoy the local history year ahead at dear old Lamorbey Park.

Frances Oxley
Editor and Secretary