

Lamorbey
& Sidcup
LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



Newsletter
Autumn
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EDITORIAL

by Frances Oxley, Hon. Secretary and Editor.

I am writing this at the end of August just as the very hot weather is coming to an end. Yesterday, I was in Greenwich Park and was saddened by the aspect that greeted me - everywhere dry and burnt. The vista from the Observatory and Wolfe Statue down the slope to the maritime buildings was almost unrecognisable. The tourists taking their pictures of the scene this year will certainly have different ones from those of previous years. At least, we in this area have not been affected by domestic water problems. One hopes that things will return to normal by next year and our "Green and Pleasant Land" will be so again.

We have completed the first year in our new venue in the Birkbeck Hall, Alma Road School. The Society was pleased to welcome new members, many joining due to the different meeting place and in one or two cases rejoining! When the register was completed we had some 90 members enrolled. This was a plus from the move as we could not at Lamorbey take any more members - we were already in the largest room there!

Our Press Officer, Bess Dzielski, continues to get us mentioned in the local press and has an article in the Arts Council of Bexley's publication, 'Focus on the Arts' telling of our project work. As many of you will not have seen the article I give it in full later on in the newsletter. Mentioned is the photographic survey of all Sidcup shops that was suggested by Eric Percival. The volunteer group has finished the photographing - new members taking part in this - now Eric has the colossal task of presentation. A similar survey in the middle 70's by Mr. Nunns, although not on such a scale, now rests in the archives at Hall Place. Our problem at the present time is that shops are no longer family concerns that pass from one generation to the next but almost on an "Here Today-Gone Tomorrow" basis. Our photographic recording took place in the month of April, 1995 and so encapsulates that period of time.

We are ever mindful of the heritage of our local history area and so with the agreement of other committee members I have written to the Borough's Chief Executive in respect of Sidcup Place. The building might be sold due to office accommodation not now being required. I have expressed our concern over this, hoping that the issue will not turn into another "Danson" saga and certainly that the building will not be demolished. (To date, I have not received a reply to my letter). I am also writing on behalf of the Society to English Heritage suggesting that the building be statutory listed - if this is done, any prospective buyer cannot raze the building to the ground. Other organisations and private people are writing in the same vein. Angela Everett, our representative on the Borough's Conservation Consultative Committee has written to the Chief Planning Officer with regard to the Hollies House which has been allowed by the developers, Countryside, to fall into a very sorry state of dereliction. It's an interesting building and was good enough at the initial selling of property on the estate to be used as Countryside's Logo.

Eric Percival has asked me to say " In just over four year's time we shall enter the 21st century, many plans are being made by governments and councils all over the world on a suitable form of celebration. The question we are facing is how the Society observes this event - your suggestions are requested. Have a good think and let our Secretary know your ideas".

Our 87 year old member, Jennie Dakin died in August shortly after having her leg amputated. Three of us attended her funeral at Eltham Crematorium. We shall never see her like again - she always took part in members' evenings telling us of something interesting. Her daughter Alison's letter of thanks to us, concluded with, "She's now at rest and free from pain and no doubt making her contribution elsewhere".

As usual my thanks to the many contributors to the newsletter. In particular, I would mention John Seymour's article on ballooning. He never fails to show that individual research is carried on by members. This article as you will see emanated from one of our Society lectures. This is rewarding for someone like myself that compiles the Society programme! Finally, I do hope you all enjoy our 1995/6 local history year.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD

By Eric Percival

I received a letter addressed to me care of the Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society, Sidcup, Kent on which someone had written "Adult Ed" and another hand had put "Alma Road" - it was delivered to me via the class register.

It was from a lady living in Newbury (Berks) as follows:-

Dear Mr.Percival,

I do hope this letter reaches you - the PO are quite good when they feel like it.

I have a copy of the book "A Pictorial History of Sidcup" and am intrigued to know how picture No.152 came into your possession. A casual card posted in 1928 by my mother Mrs Esther Crawhurst of 24, Durham Road to 'Aunt Nell Hatrick' one would have thought would have been destroyed at the time.

'Aunt Nell', a distant relation of my father, left Plumstead pre- war and went to live in Woodchurch, Kent, where she died some 17/18 years ago. All I can think is that the card remained in a drawer and was possibly found when the house was cleared after her death. I had not seen her for many years but a sister-in-law had visited and said Nell was a real 'Miss Haversham' - cobwebs and all.

I remember a family named Percival at the top of Durham Road - I wonder whether they were your relatives?

Do hope this note finds you, I would very much like to know the history of the card. Incidentally my mother lived in Durham Road until 1980 and then spent her last four years here with me to the age of 92..... Yours sincerely.

In his book, John Mercer quotes the message on the card " If fine we will leave Sidcup at 2 o'clock, love Esther" and the fact that it was sent to Miss Haltrick at 179, Griffin Road, Plumstead. One can understand the writer of the book being amazed to read a note from her mother after 56 years. I was only able to tell her that the card was purchased in Islington over eleven years ago.

A VISIT TO THE MANOR HOUSE AT SIDCUP

By Bess Dzielski

Gracious living is not a term one immediately associates with Sidcup, but it is well used to describe the ambience of the Manor House on The Green, now sympathetically restored by Bexley Council for use as the offices of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths.

The Society was fortunate in visiting the Manor House on the evening of tenth of October, 1994, and had the pleasure of being received by the Borough Architect, Mr. Patrick Ball and being conducted round the house by the man responsible for its rejuvenation and restoration, Mr. Alex Sanderson.

Mr. Sanderson gave a brief history of the site and the house. Originally known as Shott's Farm, its first record was about 1727. Around 1790 the present building was erected on the site and until 1832 was known as Place Green House. Subsequently it was called Sidcup House. Through the nineteenth century it had various owners and tenants and by the eighteen-seventies was known as the Manor House. During this century with the development of Sidcup as a residential area it became a school for girls, then a nursing home, was rented to the Kent Red Cross and was eventually bought by Chislehurst and Sidcup Urban District Council for £10,000. Extensive repairs cost more than the purchase price, but it gave valuable service as Council Offices for many years. In the 1990's the decision was taken to restore the house and as part of its present function it provides an attractive setting for weddings.

Mr Sanderson explained how much of the top brick work had rotted and been replaced, and was even now, after less than two years, weathering to blend with the original.

The roof had been re-tiled with old tiles to maintain the character. Every effort had been made to restore the subdued and elegant atmosphere and he took particular pleasure in pointing out the standard of workmanship which could be seen in the plasterwork and carpentry.

Inside, the unobtrusive matt pastel walls show how peaceful it would have been originally, and the most striking effect was the elegance of the furniture and fittings in the Marriage Room.

The tour had some bewildering aspects through a maze of corridors and small rooms until we reached the top floor: all the rooms are now used as offices, either by the Registrar's Office or the Social Services who share the building. Particularly impressive was the way in which contemporary use with computers and office equipment had been married to the older atmosphere.

The final touch was the floodlighting of both the front and rear of the house, which provides a striking introduction to those entering Sidcup from the speed and bustle of the A20.

VISIT TO CROSSNESS

by Mary Gilhooly

On March 26th, 1995 a bright but breezy day, twenty five members of the Society took on a different appearance as they donned hard hats for a tour of the Crossness Pumping Station, near Thamesmead.

We began with an introductory talk by Michael Dunmow, Secretary to the Crossness Engines Trust, who gave a potted history of the works and the man responsible for the building, Sir Joseph Bazalgette. One of his great grandsons is currently on the Board of the Trust. We learned that Crossness was opened in 1865 by the Prince of Wales, after several outbreaks of cholera in London owing to inadequate sewerage. The engines were last used in 1953 and from then until 1985 when the Crossness Engines Trust took over, building and machinery was left derelict and vandalised.

To appreciate the immensity of the beam engines we were shown a working model together with the figure of a man, to scale. The impression was rather like standing at the foot of Nelson's column.

We split into two groups, and guided by Michael and David, a volunteer worker, were shown around what Frances described as this 'Cathedral'. And so it is, with its magnificent cast ironwork and decorated columns. It was impressive to see the work that had been done by an enthusiastic band of volunteers. The central octagon consisting of decorative screens, panels and columns with foliated capitals is now mostly gleaming in the original colours, reminiscent of a fairground, with the initials of the original owner, the Metropolitan Board of Works, prominent.

The four engines in the engine house were named after the members of the Royal Family at the time - Queen Victoria, Prince Consort, Albert Edward (Prince of Wales) and his wife Alexandra - which doesn't seem very flattering until you learn that Crossness was the first metropolitan draining system in the world. The Prince Consort is being worked on at the moment and it is hoped that the machinery will be working by the end of 1997.

Up we climbed an open stairway to peer at the top of the mechanical giants and to look down and appreciate the octagon in all its glory. Then down to the condenser chamber where a label saying 'Fifty years of Neglect' in a dank alcove, told its own story.

Alongside which, was part of an engine restored and shining, a monument to the volunteers labour. All the machinery is very carefully and clearly labelled as are directions for visitors.

As was explained the Trust needs people to visit, as their modest donations helps to buy much needed equipment. They are hoping to obtain money from the Lottery to put to a variety of uses including repairs to the roof.

The main doorway has fine stonework and is resplendent with heraldic shields relating to the five counties who used the works namely, London, Kent, Surrey, Essex and Middlesex. The doorway is now situated inside, as a building was added on a later date.

Ideas are afoot to let this out to film companies to raise money and eventually hold concerts etc.

Our tour proceeded outside where we admired the Italianate-style architecture with arched windows and fluted columns, one showing Sir Joseph Bazalgette's face, a charming and thoughtful touch. Our guide explained about the people who once lived

on the site, gleaned from the census records of the Victorian period. There were twenty one houses in the vicinity and a school which was also used as a chapel. Some of the houses were damaged during the second world war and the others pulled down afterwards.

In the fitting shop it was easy to imagine the works in their heyday, with bits of machinery scattered around and an air of activity. This was where a banquet was held at the opening ceremony, in the true Victorian style to the accompaniment of a 'Palm Court Orchestra' perched on top of the foreman's office.

We finished in the shop where there is an interesting display, and well produced prints, leaflets and postcards to purchase. Frances gave a vote of thanks to our guides, endorsed by everyone.

It was sobering to leave this beautiful Grade 1 Listed building, whose function was to house engines to dispose of sewage, then to glimpse on the horizon the tall plain tower blocks of Thamesmead, built to house people. I think our ancestors have a lot to teach us.

Since our visit, Thames Water has given a sum of £45,000 to the Trust. Editor.

A MEMORY OF VE DAY

By Margaret Gillies

Although it was obvious that the end of the war in Europe was imminent the actual time and date was a mystery until the last moment.

It so happened that my husband was given leave from the RAF in the second week in May and we had arranged to visit my parents in Petts Wood and they had agreed to look after our small son for us whilst we made use of tickets he had booked for a theatre in London on the 8th May.

There were vast crowds in the West End and great excitement all around. It was all very cosmopolitan too, with so many different shoulder flashes on display from our overseas allies.

I can't remember what show we had arranged to see, but after we came out we made our way towards Whitehall and when we were passing one of the other theatres, we were called inside as we were told that they had heard the Prime Minister was going to speak and they were broadcasting it over their public address system. We went inside and listened to the speech which confirmed that at last peace had come to Europe and then carried along to Whitehall. We were caught up in the crowds and found that we were being rushed along to where 'Winnie' was making an appearance from a balcony. There was tremendous excitement and the noise was deafening.

After that, we just let ourselves drift along with the crowds, obviously aiming towards the Palace. There was such a crush that it was extremely slow moving and although we realised from the cheering that the Royal Family must have been appearing on the balcony, we couldn't get close enough to see them and decided that somehow or the other we had better make our way back towards Charing Cross Station to catch a train home.

By that time it was dark and it seemed that every bomb site on either side of the line had its own bonfire, each being tended by its own cheering group. It was a most fantastic sight.

As we reached Petts Wood we realised that the searchlights had all lit up and that was a sight I shall never forget. During the war we had got used to groups of

searchlights aiming at particular targets, but on that night it looked as though every single searchlight in and around London had been turned on and they were all weaving about the sky in every direction. My parents had looked outside and seen this really extraordinary spectacle and decided it was so unique that they wakened our four year old son to let him see it in the hopes that it would stay in his memory the way it has always stayed in ours.

SOME HISTORICAL EVENTS OCCURRING IN THE 95'S

by John Mercer

- 1995 Anniversary of the end of World War 2 (VE and VJ Days remembered)
- 1895 Victoria is Queen for six more years
Sir John Pender living in Foots Cray Place
Emile Heineman living in Lamorbey Park
Opening of the Bexleyheath Line to Dartford.
Trial of flying machine by Hiram Maxim in Baldwyns Park
Oscar Wilde, "The Importance of Being Earnest".
Lord Salisbury becomes Prime Minister for the third time.
Factory Act. Working hours for children limited to thirty per week.
Kiel Canal completed.
Turkish Atrocities on the Armenians (No European Intervention. Russia unwilling to act, and Great Britain unwilling to act alone.)
German Emperor sends telegram of support to President Kruger.
- 1795 George the Third is King.
Benjamin Harenc living in Foots Cray Place.
Dr. David Orme living in Lamorbey Park.
William Pitt (The Younger) is Prime Minister.
Nicholas Vansittart (later Lord Bexley) is 30 and to become MP for Hastings the following year.
Speenhamland system of granting relief to poor to supplement wages.
Bonaparte quells Paris rising against the Convention.
British capture Cape of Good Hope.
Russia and Prussia partition Poland.
George Washington. First President of the USA from 1789.
- 1695 William and Mary jointly reign.
Bank of England is one year old.
Battle of the Boyne was fought 5 years ago (Hurrah for King Billy, shout the Orangemen still!).
- 1595 Queen Elizabeth on the throne.
Sir Thomas Walsingham living at Scadbury.
Christopher Marlowe died mysteriously two years earlier in a Deptford Tavern Brawl.
- 1495 Henry Tudor (Henry the Seventh) has been on the throne 10 years.

His second son, Henry, is 4 years old, becoming King at 18 in 1509.
Eltham Palace a favoured royal residence.

- 1395 Richard the Second is King until deposed later by Bolingbroke. (Henry the Fourth)
- 1295 Edward the First (the hammer of the Scots) is reigning. Acted as arbitrator between John Baliol and Robert Bruce. Thus began the attempts of Edward to subdue and conquer Scotland.
- 1195 Richard the First on the throne but always out of the country.
We all know about Robin Hood but he never came this way.
- 1095 William Rufus continuing his father's subjugation of England.
Foots Cray is well record in the Domesday Book.
- 995 ??? I give up.

GUNPOWDER, APPLES & CREAM TEAS

by Joan Seymour

Early morning on Saturday, April 22nd, saw intrepid members of the Society setting out through showers of sleet-like drizzle and cold wind to enjoy an outing in the Kentish countryside. Nothing daunted, we boarded the coaches and thus began a very interesting and memorable day.

On arrival at Faversham we were met by Tour Guides and given coffee at the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre, then divided into groups for a guided tour of the town. This was of great historical interest, with many medieval houses and Abbey Street especially notable as one of the finest streets of timber-framed houses in the south of England. We learned much about the historical events which had taken place in Faversham, and one story which stays in the mind is that of Arden's House in Abbey Street. This was the home of Thomas Arden, twice Mayor of Faversham, who was murdered at the instigation of his wife in 1551.

A highlight of the tour was the visit to the Chart Gunpowder Mills, which are the oldest of their kind in the world. It has been ascertained that the factory began work before 1558, but was derelict when the Faversham Society rescued the buildings in 1967. They were restored and are now a focus of great interest in the town. The mill is on the banks of a small stream and here we found a most amusing scene taking place between a cat and some ducks - the cat crouching on the bank over the water and the ducks swimming up and down in front of it, quacking derisively. Our walk round the town continued to the creek, where once there was so much busy commerce, then by way of the various old streets past two breweries of which only one is now in operation - the famous Shepherd Neame. We also visited the lovely church which has a crown steeple. Unfortunately the fabric of the building is in need of much repair and restoration.

After exploring the Heritage Centre bookshop we returned to the coaches and continued on our way, greatly cheered by some sunshine at long last ! Arriving at

Brogdale in time for lunch we enjoyed a good meal with plenty of crisp salad and pleasant conversation. Brogdale is the home of the National Fruit Collection and is unique in that it houses 2,200 varieties of apples, 550 types of pear, 350 varieties of plum, 220 different cherries and 320 bush fruits on its 12 hectares of land. Apart from these orchards, there are Citrus Houses containing oranges, lemons, grapefruit, clementines and other such fruits, all in bloom and with fruit hanging on the branches. Quite a sight! We were given guided tours of the apple orchards, during which we were told many fascinating things about the history and cultivation of the fruit. Much work is done to assess the resistance to disease and laboratories are among the facilities for research. There is also an excellent shop which sold a tempting selection of goods such as wines, kitchenware, jams and chutneys, toiletries and books.

It was now time to board the coaches again and drive to our final destination which was Oad Street Craft Centre. As it was now tea-time, we were delighted to find another pleasant restaurant where we enjoyed a splendid cream-tea with hot scones and a choice of irresistible cakes - and large pots of tea. The Centre contained several interesting workshops where craftsmen were making porcelain figures, picture frames, restoring furniture, and one shop was devoted to dried flower arrangements. The main shop was a treasure-trove of lovely things which we enjoyed browsing through.

So ended our day, with a relaxing drive home after a memorable (but rather tiring!) tour. We all gave a sincere vote of thanks to Frances and Gill for organising such a splendid day.

DOREEN JOAN BIRD

By Kath Carty

One of the countries foremost Colleges of Further Education in the world of Theatre Arts is right here in Sidcup. Doreen Bird is the Principal and 1995 marks the Golden Jubilee celebrating her founding of the College.

Born on the 27th January, 1928, Doreen lived in Wilmington Square, Clapham, London. Her father was the manager of a rupture appliance company, Brooks, and her mother was of Czechoslovakian descent. The family moved to Sidcup in 1933 and lived at Braundton Avenue. In 1971, Doreen married an American businessman, Frank Entry Cook and they continue to live in Old Perry Street, Chislehurst.

At the age of eight she went to Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School for Girls (now Beaverwood School) and attended the Hilda Greenaway School for Dance at Charlton (now the Dorothy Marshall School). At sixteen she went to Bush Davies School (East Grinstead), having already passed her Royal Academy of Dancing Advanced Ballet examination. She was there for a year during which time she also taught at the Romford Branch of Bush Davies.

At the end of the war, Doreen's teaching was at Bush and also Madam Vacani's School in Central London amongst other schools. She also started her own school at the house at Braundton Avenue, where she taught on Saturday mornings, rolling up the carpet in the front room to use as a studio. Her first student, Maisie McPhee is now head of the Dance Department at Riason College in Canada. At the same time as running the school, Doreen attended classes in London and was in cabaret.

In 1951, Doreen bought a house in Main Road and had six full time students. One of her pianists, Mrs. Phillips (Fuffy) lived there with her family on the top floor. The winter of 1951 was a hard one weatherwise and the pupils couldn't get to class, so she had a large mortgage and no money - a very hard winter!!

In 1965 she bought Studio House, Station Road, Sidcup and as well as 15 - 20 full time students, she had a thriving evening and Saturday children's school.

Then in 1977 due to expansion of the number of full time students, another building had to be found. Birkbeck School, Sidcup, was now lying empty and Doreen started using this for additional classes, hiring three halls in Sidcup as well and continuing to own Studio House. After long negotiation, full possession on a long lease was granted to Doreen in 1979. The Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Heath officially opened Birkbeck in 1979 as the Doreen Bird College of Performing Arts. Each year 30 girls and 10 - 15 boys enrol for the three year course and of the full complement of an average of 120 students, there is a representation from overseas.



Birkbeck Centre

DBC Performing Arts

A Bursary Trust was set up in 1979 which offers financial help to 2nd and 3rd year students who need help with their fees. In addition there are three first year scholarships: the Gillian Lynne for girls, the Roy Castle Memorial Scholarship for boys and the Doreen Bird scholarship which can be awarded to either a boy or a girl.

In 1983, the house next to the Birkbeck Centre was bought and is used as the Administration Offices (Admin. Cottage). A further studio was added using part of the car park and the garden of Admin. Cottage.

In 1992 the studio at Studio House, Station Road was demolished and a new Studio Theatre was built, affording the opportunity for students to perform and gain experience of what lies ahead in their professional careers.

For many years the College has staged its Summer Production at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley; this is always a huge success as the singing, acting and not least of all the dancing, are of such a high professional standard.

Currently, her ex-students can be seen in many West End Theatres and Touring Productions and in leading Ballet Companies both here and abroad and the College can boast to a high success rate in the placement of students leaving each year - no mean feat in today's climate of unemployment.

Doreen is ever mindful of the need to educate young children to appreciate the Arts and the College's Dance Theatre in Education Company travels to schools, performing at a level young children can associate with. Frequently this proves to be the children's first introduction to live theatre, and the performance is structured so that there is a great deal of audience participation! In addition a small professional touring company has this year been formed.

Doreen has served on the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance, National Branch Committee and the Modern Branch and examined for the Imperial Ballet Branch. She has also served on the Council of I.S.T.D. and for short period was Chairman of the Finance Committee. She has been a key figure in the creation of many Modern syllabi.

She has also been a representative on the Executive of the Council for Dance Education and Training and was one of four representatives for the Conference of Dance Schools which represents 22 schools for further training in the private sector.

Doreen Bird continues to be a committed promoter of good dance standards in the private sector through committee and promotional work.

The author was for many years Miss Doreen Bird's secretary - Editor.

A ROYAL BRITISH LEGION PILGRIMAGE TO WAR GRAVES IN GERMANY

by Phyllis Parker

On the pilgrimage in 1989 I accompanied a friend who was visiting her husband's grave for the first time. In order to be sure that we would be at the Union Jack Club in London for an early start the next day, we decided to stay there overnight. On arrival at about 8.30pm. we were given our room numbers and keys and vouchers for breakfast. Having disposed of our cases, we found and joined other members of the same party.

All were up very early the next morning and we were on the coach that was to take us to Dover by 7am. Those taking part numbered thirty three - we were accompanied by seven officials including the Standard Bearer and a nurse. We joined the ferry, Saint Christopher at 9.45am to sail to Calais. From there we journeyed through France and Belgium and Holland where we stayed overnight at Nymegen. The next morning travelling in thick mist we went through the Reichswald Forest, crossing the Nymegen and Arnhem Bridges. Later in the morning we were in the Munster War Cemetery for the first of the personal visits by the Pilgrims and a memorial service.

From there we lunched at the Mess of 113 Provost Corporals of the Royal Military Police having been escorted by two of them on motor-cycles. Our departure was delayed owing to the illness of a male member of the party and eventually we had to leave without him and his wife - the army doctor thought it advisable for him to stay in the Military Hospital for treatment. We heard later that his condition had improved enough for him to be flown home. We continued on to Hamburg where the next day my friend and I joined the group for the Family Eucharist at the English church of St. Thomas a Becket. Rite A was used and sung, the service being conducted

by Rev. David Prosser. One of our leaders read the lesson and the British Legion standard was paraded. The service was well attended by both English and German people - we found them very friendly when we had coffee at the back of the church afterwards. The church was built in 1836, destroyed during the war but rebuilt afterwards by our Royal Engineers. Later we went to the Hamburg War Cemetery where a personal visit was made by some of the party and we took part in another Legion Service together with the local Consul-General. Afterwards we explored the city and then relaxed by the harbour where we could see the "Tall Ship", (very distinctive because it was painted green) that represented West Germany in the Tall Ships Race, that had started from London a week previously and I had seen from the water front at Greenwich.

Early the next day we saw the High Commissioner arrive in a large car - he was to accompany some of our party to the War Graves at Kiel. The rest of us were bound for Hanover - a two hour drive - passing across Luneburg Heath where the surrender of the Germans was taken on 4th May, 1945. Personal visits were made at the Hanover Cemetery and after a picnic lunch we drove back to our hotel in Hamburg for an evening reception at the Consulate given by the H.M. Consulate General. It was held on the paved garden of a very large house and attended not only by our party but also members of the Consulate staff - both English & German - and also members of the local British Legion. We were offered cocktail snacks from large trays borne by some young members of the community and served with glasses of wine. Everyone was friendly - I talked to a Scot who said he had decided to stay in Germany after his army service days were over - he married a German lady who had died after some years and was now enjoying life out there with a second German wife. I understood that this reception was held annually at the time of the Legion's visit to Hamburg.

The next day we said farewell to Hamburg and made our way to the small town of Soltau and then on to the War Cemetery named Becklingen. This was a sad day for my friend - she was one of the eight members of the party to visit the graves of their loved ones in this cemetery. The procedure was the same as at all cemeteries - the people most concerned would leave the coach first accompanied by a supporter and bearing the wreath of poppies given to them by the Legion for placing on the grave. After allowing time for private prayers, the rest of the party went into the cemetery for the Service of Remembrance held in the shadow of the large cross which overlooks the graves. On this occasion the service was conducted by an Army Chaplain of the Royal Horse Artillery and the music for the hymns was played by the military band, whose trumpeter sounded the last post. Wreaths were laid by the Consul-General and also on behalf of the London & Berlin branches of the British Legion.

The service over, we were then taken to lunch in the Warrant Officers and Sergeants Mess of the 1st Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery. About twenty personnel were there to welcome us and chat over drinks. Their opinion of life in the army of occupation varied - some enjoyed it - with wives and children in barracks - others could not wait for the time to come when they could return to home base. They joined us in a very nice lunch of cold meats and salad. We left them at 2.30pm. and were allowed to visit Hohne NAAFI to buy duty-free goods after which we made our way back to Nymegen via Osnabruck.

The next morning we travelled quickly through Holland into Belgium where we had a stop of three hours in Bruges - then through France to Calais. On this

occasion we joined the ferry, St. Anselm arriving at Dover at 6 o'clock. Our coach sped us towards London stopping at Maidstone to put down the nurse who had looked after us so well.

We were not sure what time we would arrive in London so we had previously arranged to spend another night in the Union Jack Club (near Waterloo Station) which we had found a comfortable place in which to stay. Founded by Miss Ethel McCaul (1867 - 1931) the original building was much used by service personnel during the wars and now it would appear that the new modern structure is very popular today with service and ex-service men and women and their families.

We left for home the next day at the end of a very well organised pilgrimage - having travelled a total of 1,342 miles.

(I was particularly moved when I typed the account of this pilgrimage. My thoughts were also with those that have no known graves but live on in the hearts of their loved ones. Each year the numbers making up these parties that journey to the European cemeteries are dwindling so we must be grateful that the War Graves Commission staff and local people ensure that the young men and women buried in them are enshrined in beautiful peaceful surroundings and not forgotten by their countrymen. This article although written after the journey of 1989 is still worth recording as this year we remember the 50th anniversaries of VE & VJ Days. Editor)

IN THE CONQUEROR'S FOOTSTEPS

By Liz Fleet

May 27th, 1995 dawned bright and sunny for our outing to Tenterden, Hastings and Battle. The coffee stop was at Tenterden, a Wealden town on the edge of Romney Marsh. The town is so named because the Men Of Thanet, the Tenetware came to claim lands here for pasture for their pigs which became a 'den'. With the gradual clearance of the forest, pigs gave way to sheep and so the area became famous for its wool and subsequently for the broadcloth industry. Trade was good, as at this time the sea reached to the local port of Smallhythe. During the sixteenth century the coastline changed, so Tenterden lost its maritime tradition although it is still known as a Limb of Rye and a member of the Confederation of Cinque Ports. The town retains its old world charm with an abundance of timber framed houses. We visited the Museum which depicts the history of Tenterden.

We then travelled on to Hastings where we enjoyed a fish and chip lunch on The Stade. This houses the tall black sheds in which the fishermen dry their nets. It is a feature peculiar to Hastings. Having restored our energy, my friend and I explored the "Old Town", looking down all the alleyways and twittens where we noticed many interesting old houses. The town has far more to offer than just the sea front. Had we had more time we could have used the funicular to view the ruins of Hastings Castle.

We returned to the coach for the final part of our day - a visit to the site of the Battle of Hastings. Frances told us that one could just wander round the entrance to the battle site or tramp all the way round it. She suggested that my friend and myself would be doing the latter. When we checked in we were all handed what looked like mobile phones called 'wands'. As we arrived at various points on the field we pressed a button on the wand and were then given descriptions of the battle by the people of the time.

The day was rounded off with a cream tea before returning home.

Once again a memorable day with thanks to Frances and Gill.

SIDCUP'S LINK WITH AVIATION HISTORY

by John Seymour

The following is a quotation from Frank H. Butler's book (1), referring to the year 1901. "On September 24th I was staying with my daughter at Shere, in Surrey, previous to setting out on a motor tour through Scotland. An accident to my daughter's car, caused by an escape of petrol, made it necessary to abandon the trip, and Miss Butler suggested by way of compensation for our disappointment that we should make a balloon ascent. We undertook the adventure in the balloon 'The City of York', which had a gas capacity of 42,000 cubic feet, and ascended from the Crystal Palace. The Hon. C. S. Rolls came with us as a third passenger, and the balloon was under the control of Mr. Stanley Spencer. We remained in the air over London for two hours, and before we came down in Sidcup Park, in Kent, we had decided to form the Aero Club. The foundation members of the club were Miss Vera Butler, the Hon. C. S. Rolls and myself".

This describes a flight to Sidcup which is famous in aviation history because it led to the formation of the Aero Club. The three passengers were all active members of the Automobile Club (later the RAC), so formation of the Aero Club was agreed by the Committee and registered through the Secretary of the Automobile Club. Butler goes on to say that the Committee looked to an aero club "to control the science and sport of balloons, dirigibles and otherwise, aeroplanes and so forth, which with the aid of the light petrol engine, seemed destined to become a means of locomotion". Prophetic words indeed and I wonder what he had in mind for the 'so forth' category? A dirigible was an airship which could be steered, unlike the balloon which could go only where the prevailing wind took it.

Who were these people who descended on Sidcup in the autumn of 1901? Each of the passengers drove their own car, similar to the early veteran cars in the present-day London - to - Brighton Run every November. This commemorates the repeal of the Red Flag act in 1896 after which the speed limit had risen from walking pace to 12 mph.

Frank Hedges Butler (1856-1928) was a director of the wine shippers Hedges and Butler. Apparently he was a 'Bon Vivreur' and never went motoring without a box of Bath Oliver biscuits and one or two bottles of sherry. (2) A keen climber and hunter of big game, he had visited many unfrequented parts of the world including North Africa, Venezuela, Burma and Ceylon to name but a few. In 1900 he had driven a 6 hp Panhard car in the 1,000 mile tour of the Automobile Club (3), which took two or three weeks to accomplish.

Vera Butler, his daughter, was born in 1880 and had accompanied her father on his travels from 1896 onwards. She had studied at Cambridge and in Paris and in 1899 she drove her 4 1/2 hp Renault from Paris to Monte Carlo and over the Basses-Alpes. This would have been the car that broke down just before the balloon flight. She accompanied her father on the 1,000 mile tour, no doubt doing her fair share of the driving! Incidentally, during a drive from Paris to London, she was the first lady motorist to be fined for exceeding the speed limit. She is credited with having proposed the idea of an aero club

during the 1901 balloon flight, at a height of about 4,000 feet.(4)

The Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls (1877 - 1910) was the third son of Lord Llangattock of The Hendre near Monmouth. He gained a degree in mechanical

engineering from Cambridge in 1898 and was awarded the Gold Medal for his performance in the 1,000 mile race in 1900. He met Henry Royce in 1904 and the firm of Rolls-Royce was incorporated in 1906. He was to become famous both as the salesman for Rolls-Royce cars and as a pioneer aviator but he died in July 1910 when his flimsy flying machine broke up in mid-air at the Bournemouth International Meeting.

Stanley Spencer was a professional balloon pilot who was world famous because of his demonstrations in China, South America and India as well as all over Europe, reaching a height of 27,297 feet in 1893. He was not a member of the Aero Club because of his professional status. He died in 1906 from typhoid contracted in India.

After its formation in 1901 the Aero Club became very active in promoting ballooning as a sport and issuing pilot licences. Apart from the hire or purchase of a balloon part of the pleasure consisted in travelling to the meeting by car, so only the rich could afford to take part. Meetings were held regularly at the Crystal Palace and the Ranelagh and Hurlingham Polo Clubs, as well as at stately homes. The great years of ballooning as a fashionable sport were from 1905 to 1908, after which powered flight took over in Britain, inspired by Bleriot's one-way Channel flight in 1909 and C.S.Rolls two-way Channel flight in June 1910. Ballooning was replaced by flying displays at airfields such as Hendon and Brooklands. In 1910 the club became the Royal Aero Club in recognition of its achievements in promoting aviation, which was still only a rich person's activity.

Returning now to 1901 how would the balloon have been prepared for take off from Crystal Palace and landing at Sidcup? It was filled with coal gas, not hydrogen, and so needed space close to a gas works for take off but unlike the modern hot-air balloon it was quiet. There was no means of replenishing the gas during the flight, so ballast was carried in the form of sandbags, which were emptied to make the balloon climb. In an emergency whole sandbags were simply dropped over the side: too bad for anyone standing underneath!

To reduce height gas could be released through a valve and again in an emergency a section of fabric could be ripped out. This was not done too often due to the costs of repair. An essential piece of equipment was the trail rope. This was about 60 feet long, often with a small anchor attached, which trailed along the ground and helped to stabilise the balloon near the ground. It also wreaked havoc with buildings and roofs, adding further to the expense!

Finally, where exactly was Sidcup Park? This question might have been settled by the Sidcup and Kentish Times but no report of the landing could be found. In 1901 a Park was a private estate and not a public place, as it would be today and contemporary directories say that the three principal Parks in Sidcup were Frognaal, Lamorbey Park and Foots Cray Park. On the 25" OS map Sidcup Place is shown with Frognaal, Lamorbey and Foots Cray Place. Where Foots Cray is concerned Place and Park seem to be interchangeable, so Sidcup Park might mean Sidcup Place.

However, of the four estates my view is that Frognaal is the most likely for the landing, since the surrounding fields are larger than those round Sidcup Place. To reach Foots Cray Place would have meant running the trail rope over the built-up area of Sidcup and there were also many trees round the house. Lamorbey had some sizable fields but it would have been approached over Halfway Street and it had a pair of large lakes too!

A balloon approaching Sidcup from the direction of the Crystal Palace, about seven miles away, would have passed close to the fields of Marlborough House School, where the headmaster was the Rev. Orlando Beater, my mother's grandfather. No doubt the boys would have been delighted to assist in securing the balloon and collapsing the envelope but those tasks must have fallen to estate workers, probably at Frognaal. The pilot would have arranged for the folded balloon to be put on a cart and taken to Sidcup Station for return to Crystal Palace, while his passengers consulted Bradshaw's Railway Guide for the time of the next train to London. An up-to-date copy of Bradshaw was an essential piece of equipment in any balloon.

Acknowledgements and References

John King, for his talk to the Society on Croydon Airport

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John Blake, Former librarian of the Royal Aero Club

John Baker, archivist of the British Balloon and Airship Society

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DANSION MANSION

by Angela Everett

I was very pleased and proud to be invited to the ceremony marking the signing of the lease to transfer Dansion Mansion from Bexley Council to English Heritage on Friday, July 7th. I was allowed an afternoon off school and arrived rather early at the Boat-house in Dansion Park where the ceremony was to take place but I was soon joined by other guests. There were Local Councillors, Officers of the Borough, members of the Civic Society and other local worthies, notably The Mayor and two local MP's, David Evenett and Cyril Townsend. The short ceremony was followed by speeches by both the Mayor, Colin Wright and Jocelyn Stevens, Chairman of English Heritage after which they signed an imposing document.

The reception which followed was memorable both for the delightful selection of tasty food for the buffet and the interesting company. After lunch some of the guests strolled across the park between the marquees put up for the Bexley Show, to the Mansion itself, shrouded in scaffolding and plastic sheeting to protect it from the weather.

We were shown round the interior by Ian Vardin, the Project Manager for the restoration and his enthusiasm for the task in hand was very infectious.

The only time I had ever been inside the building was to buy an ice-cream from the cafe many years ago so I was delighted to have such a comprehensive tour.

The house was designed by Sir Robert Taylor in the 1760's with the main rooms arranged round a central oval staircase lit by a glazed dome above. Many of the rooms retain features of interest which will be restored and although the fireplaces have been removed they too will be replaced. Ignominious pigeons roosting on

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broken beams on the first floor landing were the most obvious of many signs of dereliction but it was yet possible to envisage how the house will look when the £2.3m restoration project is completed.

We were promised another visit when the house has been restored to its former glory and I only hope I will be invited on that occasion too.

"THE LAMORBEY I KNEW"

by John Edmonds

I was born in 1932, my parents having moved into Old Farm Road East in 1928 when the railway had been electrified. The road was unadopted and Old Farm Avenue was yet to be built in the 30's. One of my earliest memories was a firework display (commemorating in 1936, George V's and Queen Mary's Silver Jubilee) in Danson Park, to which I walked with my parents. I have always loved fireworks but I think the VE Celebration fireworks in Danson Park this May (with lasers and Holst's Planets on Tannoy) rate as the best display I have ever seen - including Expo 86 in Vancouver!

My primary schooling started in 1938 at Burnt Oak Lane School, which still comprised a large number of children from "The Hollies". Our Headmaster was Mr. Day and the Head Teacher, Miss Furse who now lives in retirement in Eltham. During the war the boys' hobby when the all clear had sounded was the collection and swapping of shrapnel. A local target, painted conspicuously white even today, was the Halfway Street Drill Hall which replaced Lamorbey House in 1936/7 and which with the departure of British Telecom, I may live to see demolished. Having two Warrant Officers billeted in our house enabled us access to 'ENSA' shows in the Drill Hall which were first rate. The early Radar sets used there interrupted our wireless reception with their bleeps. With searchlights and 3.7's a few feet from our garden fence we certainly knew the war was on!

So for the record I've tried to recollect a stroll through Lamorbey as it would have been in 1937. Most of the houses and roads had been completed by then and unlike today all the shops were in business. I'll start by arriving on the loop-line from Dartford (on the up side) with No.51 buses reversing up the station approach for return to Farnborough. You needed to watch out for these quite frequent buses - their conductors would stand on their open rear stairs to check the reversing since they were too tall to pass under the railway bridge which had been built in 1866 to enable horse-drawn traffic to pass underneath. At night we heard the goods wagons and coal trains being very noisily shunted in the railway sidings to the east of the station - now a commuters' car park. So, under the railway bridge with narrow pavements, to emerge by the grandiose Station Hotel (now site of Gateways Supermarket) run by the Leppard Family. As children we used to go into the stables at the back to feed the cart-horses belonging to the Coal Merchants. Across the road was the office block of the estate agents, Dyer, Son and Creasy. (Doug Creasey was involved with the local sports clubs and the Rotary Club of Sidcup and also a JP). Next to the Station Hotel was Beasley's off-licence and then alongside an alleyway, "The South Iron Company" run by the ever helpful Bassett brothers. They had an amazing stock of stove-parts, plumbers requisites, builders supplies etc. - a true emporium. Then, Mr. Rappitt's shoe shop next to Spiers the newsagents (now Forbuoys). Goddards grocery shop followed, a real village grocer's shop, everything cut and measured to order, probably by Mr. Goddard himself. Then we came to Potters, the cycle shop where you could buy from Mr. & Mrs. Potter anything from a complete bicycle to a valve rubber. Passing a

passageway and a large pair of gates with a notice on them "Walter Lane & Co. Halfway Street Sawmills" (run by the four Wells brothers) we had Mr. Hunt and his chemist shop. A couple of years ago at some 90 years he was living an active retirement in Streete in Somerset. Next Eric Thomas's outfitters shop, (there until quite recently) then Bowyers the greengrocers followed by Martins Monumental Masons and Dunns the florists which is still trading. The primary school on the corner was then the Holy Trinity School which was built in 1878. I've missed Miss Hammond's Hairdressing Salon next to Eric Thomas! Holy Trinity Church would have looked then much as it does today, but, in fact it was seriously damaged by a V1 Doodlebug in 1944 and was extensively rebuilt after the war. The first house on the right in Burnt Oak Lane - dated 1841 - was the First National School. In 1937 it was occupied by Mr. Billy Wells (one of the Wells brothers), his daughter is still living there today. He bought a television set to see the 1937 coronation - I particularly remember seeing the set in action. Further some terraced cottages showing 'JM 1874' which denotes that the Malcolm Family of Lamorbey Park had them built. Opposite these cottages is Burnt Oak Lane School which was originally built in 1909 as part of the Southwark Childrens' Homes which we know as The Hollies. I attended the school from 1938 to 1942 and I saw the transition from peace to war. Two cottages on the corner with Halfway Street were demolished and a large underground air raid shelter built there - now covered by rose beds in The Glade.

If we retrace our footsteps back to Dyer, Son & Creasey, we then had Barclays Bank and next a grocer's shop. Butcher Curnow's shop was on the corner of Old Farm Avenue and then the new block - Lewis the Tobacconists, Bata's shoe shop, Meyer's greengrocery, Hall's butchers shop (I've missed Lane's stationery and lending library) Logan's bakery with wedding receptions upstairs (now Sophie's Choice) a toy shop, Loosely's ?, Turners sweetshop & tobacconist next to the Odeon Cinema (now Lamorbey Baths). Another sweetshop and then a cafe? and a gap with a giant pear tree which always tempted the local venturesome youths! The Post Office sorting office was new then, next to it the lovely White House, Lilac Cottage and then the black & white Tudor Yeoman House which would look delightful in the Weald of Kent. Two more houses and then 'Old Farm', an old Hall House and now part of the Halfway Street Conservation Area. Passing Lamorbey House i.e. the Drill Hall and the house 'Lochinvar' we have 'Ye Olde Black Horse', at that time the publican was Mr. Allen whose four daughters helped in the pub. So an excellent place to stop - I hope you have enjoyed our stroll rolling back nearly sixty years.

Mr. Edmonds wrote this article for the newsletter after he spoke to us at a society meeting and then later led a walk round the area. Editor.

The Article on the Society that appeared in the Arts Council Newsletter.

The Society's publications include an account of the local effects of the Great Storm, two volumes of local residents' reminiscences with an additional supplement published in May, 1995. The current project is a photographic survey carried out by members of over 500 shops in Sidcup to document changes from the previous survey carried out some years ago. An on-going project launched earlier this year is the compilation of a biography index of local residents. Suggestions are being sought of names for inclusion, with as many details as possible of the life and work of the subject. Doctors, solicitors, shopkeepers, councillors, clergy, teachers, in fact anyone who has made a contribution to Sidcup life. Lord Bexley and Dame Ethel Smyth are two of the more notable names, but people like Miss Barker and Albert Feake, shopkeepers in Days Lane. and Nina Austral, dance teacher, are examples of those to be included. This is a project in which the Society is looking for much outside help. Suggestions and information will be welcomed from a wide a field as possible.

(Kath Carty has contributed to this project with her article on Doreen Bird, another teacher of dance still well-known today. Society members, please keep this project moving, there must be many people out there that are interesting enough for us to record! Editor)

Iamorbey
& Sidcup
LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY