

# Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL  
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 1996



## LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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All articles in this newsletter have been written by members of the Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society. Meetings of the society take place at Alma Road Adult Education Centre, Sidcup during term time. Miss Oxley, Secretary, may be contacted at 48, Beverley Avenue, Sidcup. Kent. DA15 8HE





## EDITORIAL

I am writing this editorial on the last day of our holiday in Yorkshire. The fortnight has gone quite quickly but in the time we have gained many impressions. Firstly, the great City of York is now a super tourist attraction and in some ways seems to have lost the dignity of a cathedral city. Might it have been better if the Jorvik-Viking finds had not been found? One can only conjecture. However, the archaeological dig brought forth much needed evidence to link the Saxon and Norman periods. There is so much in York for the real lover of history, York Minster (where there is no compulsory entrance fee yet!), the Bars or Gates, the houses in the Shambles where the upper storeys from both sides of the street almost touch and where the names of the streets readily remind you of the trades that were carried on in them. The York for us history lovers is still there but you really must pick your time for a visit so that it can be appreciated.

The effect of TV programmes is to be seen on all sides. The shops here in the North, have books on Heartbeat Countryside, Herriot Countryside and Emmerdale. We decided to visit Goathland, the setting of 'Heartbeat', driving on the Scarborough road via Pickering with, I think every other tourist in the North East of England. Off this road it was quite an adventure going over the moors which were mauve with flowering heather, until one arrives at Goathland (alias Aidensfield) where you might well have been in Blackpool. Yes, we were just as guilty as the others in wishing to see where PC Rowan and his colleagues were filmed.

What we did find charming and heart rendering were the many ruins of abbeys around the area. Probably 'Fountains' is the most famous and since my last visit 30 years ago now in the hands of the National Trust. The reception area is vast and the restaurant can cater for several hundred tourists. Fortunately when you leave this area the grounds are so vast that people mingle with the scenery. The jewel for me was Rievaulx Abbey, set in a valley and viewed by most visitors from man made terraces above. I pose my second question - was it really necessary for these religious houses to be dissolved by 'Our Enry' four centuries ago? Perhaps I can find a speaker sometime, to set the scene and persuade us of the necessity of 'The Dissolution'.

I returned home to Sidcup, having decided that I would never again arrange a holiday in August. But in more serious vein, because the countryside has been opened up to the motorist, it has had the dire effect that we tourists are spoiling it. At Goathland, reseeding of the verges was taking place as so many feet had trampled on them. There is no answer to this problem. Economics are also involved as in many cases the rural way of life has gone and villagers need the money brought in by the tourists. Perhaps I shall just bury my head in the sand on this problem and take my holiday in February! In reality I cannot do this as our local history meetings and classes are then in full swing!

Frances Oxley-Editor.



## SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

The most important event has been that of the marriage of our Chairman, Miss Iris Morris - now Mrs. Ian Heddle. We had expected that once she retired she would be able to devote more time to society matters. Fate decreed otherwise in the form of Ian from The Orkneys. Their courtship was carried on by telephone line from Sidcup to Stromness and vice versa and the engagement announced when he came down for a few weeks. As you know we were able to purchase a glass vase as our present, which Mr. Arthur Crane beautifully inscribed. An engagement card was signed by many members of the society. This was later altered to read 'Wedding' as Iris and Ian were married quietly in Stromness on Saturday, 1st June. Somehow the grapevine was at work so I was able to phone our congratulations and request that on their next foray south the committee should be allowed to 'wine and dine' them. This we did later at the Jacobean Barn (on one of the hottest nights of the year) presenting the card and glass vase. Iris sent a thank-you card saying "It was a delightful meal spent with dear friends. I will miss you all very much but as was frequently said, 'This is just au revoir'. We will be in frequent contact by phone and on the occasion of one of our visits south surely we will be able to fix up another meal together. Please thank the members of the Society for signing the card and Arthur Crane for the engraving. We will treasure the candy jar and fill it with Orkney goodies. Iris". On the same card Ian writes "Dear Everyone, Thank you so much for the delightful reception you all gave me, when I was introduced to you as the husband of your dear Chairman, Iris. You have heard her say how she was similarly welcomed when I introduced her to local friends at our Kirk in Orkney. We both thoroughly enjoyed the evening with you, sharing excellent meals and we shall together treasure the kind thoughts and good wishes which was the origin of the whole generous gesture".

Although as her friends we shall miss her, at the same time we feel that she deserves her happiness having been so involved with family problems and intense pressure with school work over many years. So we wish them both every happiness both now and in the future. Should anyone wish to forward a Christmas card, Iris's address is as follows:- Cletyan, Ireland Road, Stenness, Stromness, Orkney. KW16 3EZ

I am sure that you will be pleased to learn that our member, Mary Gilhooly has achieved her BA Degree with Honours. You will remember how she has twice entertained us with her readings from her much loved book, Kings and Queens of England.

Society membership is continually growing with over 100 names on the register for 1995/6. Fortunately we are now able to cope by having our meetings in the large hall at Alma Road. Our lectures have been varied and interesting, ranging from Dr. Banji's thought provoking one, followed by taking an 18th century coach journey with Miss Vinall. Members Evening on 24th January was a delight with Iris Morris, June Hughes, Mary Gilhooly, Anne Brunton, Valerie Allen, Toni Ridley, John Mercer and Ron Birch participating. Each year one or two different people join those willing to speak for a few moments on an interesting subject. A unique evening was that of 28th February when members of the Erith and Belvedere Local History Society presented from a TV studio the actual news of 1849. It was so professional and real that I requested the member giving the vote of thanks, to come forward and do this from the TV studio! It was certainly one of our most enjoyable evenings. Jim Packer, the author of 'Bexley Pubs' (a good read) spoke to us, specifically on Sidcup Pubs.



(He particularly, and John Mercer for the Civic Society have started a campaign to retain well known pub names - Orange Kipper at Crayford has thankfully returned to The Bear and Ragged Staff). On May 8th, Denise Baldwin and Kathy Harding gave us the fruits of their research on Sidcup Personalities, Dame Ethel Smyth and Douglas Macmillan, the founder of the Macmillan fund. We hope that the text of their lecture will soon be translated into a booklet.

Our visits and outings have I think been appreciated and well supported - i.e Sidcup Place, RACS Archives, Syon & Osterley, Home of the Chelsea Pensioners & The Army Museum, Footscray Meadows, Arundel, Eltham, and Horton Kirby.

Through the efforts of us and other societies, Sidcup Place has been upgraded from the Local List to the Statutory List Grade 2. I attended a press conference at Sidcup Place presided over by the Chief Planning Officer, Ms. McKay when a Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance was issued as a guide to potential buyers. At this meeting I put forward your view that it should be used for educational or cultural purposes. There is currently a large planning application for the conversion of Frogal House into sheltered apartments, plus the erection of a wing for a residential nursing home and one for the elderly mentally infirm. Frogal House is a Grade 2\* listed building which will now be restored. An application for the demolition of one wing (which will be rebuilt) with the restoration of the rest of the Stables at The Hollies is satisfactory. The developers, Countryside, have however put in an application to demolish the Hollies Admin. building but this has been withdrawn for the present but it will rear its ugly head at the November, Conservation Advisory Consultative Committee when they will produce a structural report. The Admin. building and the Stables are deemed by the Borough Planning authority to be core buildings of the Hollies Estate and as such the developers should have refurbished them years ago. As your Secretary, I have written to the Chief Planning Officer citing various reasons against the proposed demolition.

I am pleased that at long last the Beverley Nunns bequest to Hall Place will be worked on over the next year or so and much of it should soon be on public access.

Many of you know that after Mr. George Kent's death we purchased his volumes of Bygone Kent to which we have been adding the follow on issues. In the latest, John Mercer has the text of the lecture he gave to us on the 1851 Census of Footscray. Should you wish to borrow this or any other issue, please contact Eric Percival

You will remember that John Mercer was the author of The Pictorial History of Sidcup, published by Phillimore. Now from the same press and author is the Pictorial History of Bexley, Bexleyheath and Welling. John dedicated this book to his parents who lived in Bexleyheath - there is a photograph of their wedding at Christ Church, Bexleyheath Broadway, in 1912. So John really is the local boy with expert knowledge of the area which he has used to good effect. The book has something for most people, with a good historical introduction and many photographs that indicate how the area has changed from a rural to a suburban one.

Our long time member, Philip Nash, died after a long illness on 16th January 1996. Many of us will remember his funeral service at St. James, North Cray attended by so many of his friends from the various organisations to which he belonged in some committee capacity. He was laid to rest underneath a tree in the churchyard on the opposite side of the road. This was at his own request. Our hearts were with Phyllis as she was also nobly coping with her own illness. It was with great pleasure that we welcomed her back into the Society, now being kindly ferried by her friend Mrs. Dorothy Down.

Frances Oxley-Secretary.



## **THE FIFTH BEVERLEY NUNNS MEMORIAL LECTURE**

### **The Early History of Queen Mary's Hospital**

Lecturer: Dr. Andrew Banji (Medical Director, QMH)  
18th November, 1995.

This will be a short report because I do not want to trivialise our experiences that evening and I do not think any of us has the skill to explain how we felt. Those members that were there will never forget and those members who were not there cannot imagine what it was like. It is worth recording the evening in the Newsletter because it could be considered Sidcup's greatest privilege in all its long history to have been a haven for facially disfigured men from the Flanders Trenches.

Dr. Banji conducted a Clinical Meeting concentrating on the early history of Queen Mary's Hospital (or the Queen's Hospital as it was known when it opened in 1917). It had been chosen as an overflow to take the facially injured when Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton was full to overflowing - mainly with amputees. Froggnal House was up for sale in 1915 when the project was first considered and the grounds made a suitable site for such a hospital - in the country (and therefore largely out of sight) and accessible from Charing Cross where the trains came in from the coast. The type of injuries these men presented were beyond the experience of all previous wars - as obviously the weapons used were different from that of all previous wars. The good that came out of this terrible situation was the build-up of a team of gifted surgeons from Britain and the Commonwealth who, through a combination of inspiration and pragmatic response in pooling experience and observation, built a body of expertise and procedures which are used to this day in hospitals specialising in plastic surgery such as East Grinstead and in the field in war situations such as Bosnia.

We saw photographs of attractive young men; then we saw them as first injured; then we saw them with rebuilt faces. What was so moving about the evening was that men did rebuild their lives. Although some remained and worked at the hospital too disfigured even after surgery to face the world, others learnt to cope and return to civilian life. Their first steps in this process was to move about in Sidcup. A few married local girls. The father of one of our members, Shelagh Davidson, came to Sidcup as a patient with facial injuries and later married the pretty girl from the post office.

It was a distressing evening. No one likes to see terrible mutilations and we all took quick glances at the slides and then looked away. But in seeing the truth of what happened, we were also able to see the strength of the spirit in the men and the talent of the surgeons who through some innate gift were able to respond by remoulding injured bones and tissue and making what would have been hopeless situations capable of acceptance. Dr. Banji is to be congratulated for establishing the archive at Queen Mary's and ensuring this period will never be forgotten.

Janet Woods.



- At the 1994 Leeds International 1914-1918 Commemoration Conference many papers were read by eminent people - Our Dr. Banji was one. These papers formed the nucleus of the book written by Alan Judd called 'Facing Armageddon'. A review of the book appeared in the Spectator and a paragraph was given to Dr. Banji's lecture as follows: "Andrew Banji's moving account of facial surgery and the pioneering work of Harold Gillies, which paved the way for McIndoe's better-known second world war burns work, should be read somewhere solitary and quiet, then recalled whenever you think excitement and comradeship of war (of which there was much of course) or when you read of the modern Ministry of Defence cravenly seeking equality in disfigurement by wanting to send girls to the front line. Benches near the Sidcup hospital were painted blue for use of wounded soldiers, so that local residents choosing to sit there were prepared for faceless horrors".
- It goes on to say that the book is well worth reading and shows the other side to the assumptions contained in 'O What a Lovely War'

### VISIT TO SIDCUP PLACE

On Monday, October 2nd, 1995, twenty members of the Society were privileged to 'explore' Sidcup Place, that notable local building whose future is uncertain.

We entered a charming hall with a sweeping staircase, stuccoed ceiling and magnificent mantelpiece where we were met by our guides for the evening, Council Officers, Mr. Chris Alford and Mr. John Abbott ( who was moving to Wyncham House after completing 20 years service at Sidcup Place). They ushered us into the Council Chamber where tea, coffee and biscuits were waiting. Here we learned a brief history of the house which was originally built in the 18th Century by an 'Officer of Engineers', in the shape of a star fort with angle bastions which was added to in later centuries. The Council Chamber is one of the extended areas and although the ceiling and panelling is grand it still has the feel of a schoolroom - one of its functions of the beginning of this century.

We were then guided around what appeared to be a rabbit warren of corridors and into rooms with so many architectural gems. At times the original star shape was in evidence, particularly under the clock tower. What was striking, is the variety of different windows, some mullioned, some many-paned, sash and shutters, all giving character to their surrounds. Many rooms have superb mantelpieces, all different, often hidden by modern office equipment. One room with plaster moulding has very unusual German wallpaper covered with in text. It is easy to see why Sidcup Place is not ideal office space having so many nooks and crannies and steps. After perusing all the many rooms and corners (and becoming thoroughly disorientated) we went outside to see the window at the top of the main staircase, lit up, showing in all its glory, the shield of the Chislehurst and Sidcup Urban District Council - a feature of which is the Water Tower which straddled top of Summer Hill at Chislehurst. At the end of the tour some discussion took place as to a suitable use for Sidcup Place. Adult Education seemed to be the favourite choice, to be used by appropriate groups such as The Local History Society.....!

Mary Gilhooly



## THE ENUMERATOR'S POETIC TALE OF 1851

Here we have listed the people of the Union all  
From the Turbulent North to the South held in thrall,  
Originally conceived in 1801 to count the numbers in the lands  
Of men available that could fight as trained bands,  
For England and the Union against the Napoleonic foe  
Men took up the rifle and put down the hoe.  
In 1841 the men in power decided to make a change  
They decided to extend the people in the range,  
Suspicion spread and the people went into rages  
Now were revealed the Old and Young Girls' approximate ages.  
The Heads, the Wives and the Children young and old in each location  
The Rector, the Parish Clerk, the Verger and the Convocation,  
The Able, the Cripple, and those who fought against the rules,  
The Gentry, the Ladies, the Esquires and others resembling Ghouls.  
Landlords, Fishermen, Weavers and the Military's lowly Ranker,  
Bakers, Butchers, Tailors, Widows and the high and low Ingrate  
Here we have despised Doctors, Police and the Magistrate.  
Here the unhappy folk who entered through the workhouse door  
Detested and loathed by the so-called Guardians of the Poor,  
So here's a message to my underpaid fellow Enumerators  
Think well of yourselves as one of life's timely Innovators,  
Ignore the threats of chamber-pots, dogs, shotguns & the fists  
and get the ages, names, and where born on the Census Lists.  
Many will be grateful when we are all long gone  
Of the thankless task I and thee did take on,  
Future generations will find their kinsfolk of our time  
And be thankful to us despised Enumerators in our prime,  
And so I leave thee all with this heartfelt greeting  
May we all meet at the 1861 Census without bleating,  
Raise your tankards up high, mayhap many be wed in the next decade  
The Census swell'd, by a young beau coupling with coy young maid.

*The above was originally written by Ron Birch for the Suffolk Family History Society  
- he read it to us on the evening of January 10th 1996 when John Mercer spoke on the  
1851 Census of Footscray.*



## SCHOOL DAYS IN SIDCUP

(as told to the Society on Members Evening 24th January 1996)

I was born in my grandfather's house in Foots Cray (one of Woodfall Villas, Cray Road), the eldest of three children. Shortly before the birth of their third child, my parents were allocated a brand new council house in Halfway Street (the actual postal address was Ellison Road, but we had one of the first four houses which were built fronting on to Halfway Street). This was in 1927, and two years before I was to begin school.

At that time there was a choice of only two schools which covered that part of Sidcup - Lamorbey School at the junction of Hurst Road and Halfway Street, and Longlands School in Woodside Road, off Longlands Road, both of which taught pupils between the ages of 5 and 14 (then the legal school-leaving age). The school in Burnt Oak Lane was, in those days, used exclusively for the education of the children living at 'The Homes' as we then called the Hollies. It was administered by Deptford Board of Governors and later in 1965 taken over with 'The Hollies' by Southwark Council.

My parents chose Longlands School for us, although it was the further distance from where we lived. Was it possibly because my father had been a pupil there some 20 years before? - or was it because my mother, who I believe, always had a superiority complex (do I mean delusions of grandeur?) considered it a better school?

I was nearer 6 than 5 when I began school. This was because my parents had kept me at home in the hope that my younger sister would be allowed to start school with me, and though it was only a few months after her fourth birthday she was accepted too.

So began 6 years of trudging about 2 miles each to and from school, through fields and footpaths and over a railway line by means of a pedestrian level-crossing, (no footbridge until I was 9 or 10, I think) and this in all weathers. There was only a handful of families in our area whose children attended the school at Longlands; one family from Corbylands Road, one from Valliers Wood Road and two from Ellison Road. On the days when fog or snow made it too treacherous to cross the fields or the railway, the mothers would take turns to escort the 7-8 children. On those days we had to walk the length of Halfway Street and then the length of Longlands Road - we called it 'Going Round the Road' (as opposed to 'Going Over the Line') and it seemed a much longer journey. I can remember also that sometimes my father would take us to and from school on his motor-bike, me riding pillion and my sister on the petrol tank in front! Can you imagine the laws that this would break today, or the outrage against a mother that allowed such a thing.

Apart from Wingfield Place and a sparsely populated Old Farm Avenue, there was open land between Halfway Street and the north side of the railway, and also between Footscray Road and the south side of the railway. I can remember seeing all the new roads and houses being built in those areas. On our journeys to and from school we traversed many a building site as our footpaths and fields disappeared.

Also at this time (the early 1930's) children up to the age of 14 began attending Longlands School from as far away as Sherwood Park Avenue - indeed from the whole of the newly developed area between Burnt Oak Lane and Blackfen. I had one 'best friend' who lived in Ramillies Road. Very soon however, there were new schools built in Days Lane (and later Blackfen) for the juniors, and the central school



in Alma Road for the seniors. After this time Longlands School no longer had pupils over the age of 11.

School dinners were provided, though very few children had them - I expect most parents could not afford them. We always took packed lunches and had to sit quietly in the classroom to eat them. However, once we had finished eating, we were allowed out of school and with none of the present day restrictions to hamper our freedom, we would leave the school premises and trot off to look at the local shops or visit the children who lived near enough to go home for a midday meal. My grandmother lived very close to the school, and with my sister (and later a younger brother too) I often walked the short distance to see my young aunts and uncles home from work for their midday meal, and to cadge hot potatoes or bowls of custard from Grandma!. School hours were from 9-12 and from 2-4, giving us a 2 hour dinner break. I can recall that on occasions I even walked home and back in that 2 hours, though now I cannot remember why.

I was resident in Sidcup until 1952 when I emigrated to Chislehurst. In 1993 I returned to Sidcup and moved into Longlands Road. One of the first things I did was to take the short 5 minute walk to look once more at my old school. Very little has changed from the outside, though of course the interior will have been extensively modernised. No longer are there separate playgrounds for boys and girls, and no doubt the outside toilet blocks about 20 yards from the main building have long since become obsolete.

My six years at this school were very happy and fortunately (I say this with complete lack of modesty) I was always a 'clever clogs' in the subjects which mattered to me. I never shone at physical education, country dancing or drawing. Though to this day, I encounter incredulous looks when I tell people - especially my grandchildren - that at the age of 7 I knitted a pair of socks on four needles - turning the heel and all.

During those early years of my schooling, selection for secondary schooling came into being, with the forerunner of the 11 Plus tests being used to assess children's ability, and eventually assist in the award of scholarships which enabled the brightest children to take up free places at fee-paying schools. Those considered clever enough were nominated by their junior schools to sit for the Scholarship Exam. This necessitated spending a Saturday morning at the prospective 'posh' school to undertake a written examination in English, Arithmetic, General Knowledge and a written IQ Test. A fearsome task indeed. Those who passed this written exam would then be summoned to an oral examination which was a one to one interview between child and head of the prospective school. Only if this was a success were you given a place in the school.

In the year that I was 11, I was one of only 3 pupils from Longlands School to pass this exam, and in the following September I became a pupil at Chislehurst County School for Girls ( to be renamed much later Beaverwood). The school building was new, built just a couple of years earlier, to rehouse the ever-growing number of daughters of well-to-do families, as their previous premises were too small.

Despite the pride I felt at attending such a high-class school, I found it all quite daunting, to say the least, having to wear a full uniform, obey very strict rules, behave correctly at all times, and live up to the expected standards of a young ladies establishment. Lessons were very long and the work was exacting. New subjects were thrust upon me: Algebra, Geometry, Physics, Chemistry, Domestic Science (no longer 'cooking' or 'sewing') French, Latin, and hours of homework from the very first day. Physical Education was now called Gymnastics and Eurhythmics, and



games periods included hockey and netball in winter and cricket, tennis and rounders in summer. A completely new way of life.

My scholarship included only part payment towards the cost of the uniform, which necessitated my mother making some of the items (luckily she was an accomplished dressmaker). Also as part of my scholarship I was allowed 2 school dinners a week! On the other 3 days I took packed lunches.

At all times, both in and out of school, great emphasis was put on correct behaviour and speech, and if any of the following out-of-school rules were broken, girls could be reported and suitably punished. Such rules included: complete silence in bus queues (which were monitored by senior girls); no boarding buses before any adults who might be waiting; no remaining seated on a bus if any adult was standing; no removal of hats whilst wearing school uniform. (Our hats were black velour in winter and white panama in summer. A concession was made for girls who cycled to school, they were allowed to wear berets - adorned with a school badge, of course.

With what nostalgia do I view the present day hooliganism of the young ladies of Beaverwood School - my Alma Mater.

My days at secondary school were not so happy as my younger school days, but probably only because it was much more like hard work. Real studying for five years to reach school certificate level (later called O-Level), hardly seemed to be alleviated by the leisure activities such as sports days, speech days, drama and musical productions, Christmas services and carols at St.Nicholas Church on Chislehurst Common, and visits to Scadbury Manor in small parties, for tea with Mrs.Marsham-Townsend.

My last year at school was war-time and is dotted with memories of even more new and restrictive rules, air raid shelters, loss of friends who were evacuated, and the trauma of final exams. My parents could not afford to let me stay at school after 16, so with 6 School Certificate passes, and some trepidation, I went out into the wide world.

June Hughes.

## THE ROYAL HOSPITAL, CHELSEA

The Society's interest in the Chelsea Pensioners was first aroused early in 1996 when Major Brian Corrigan, the Captain of Invalids at The Royal Hospital, Chelsea, gave a talk during the Spring programme.

The 'Nation's Conscience' were how he described the Chelsea Pensioners and he was accompanied by InPensioner Faulkner, late of the Queen's Own Highlanders, resplendent in his scarlet uniform and wearing an array of medals awarded in World War Two.

Major Corrigan explained the origins of the need to care for old soldiers, first mooted by Queen Elizabeth 1 at the end of the 16th century, but it was not until after the Restoration of Charles the 11 that positive provision was made. Although officially founded by the King with a gift of £7,000 the main fortunes of the Hospital were founded by the Paymaster General, Sir Stephen Fox, who surrendered his commission of fourpence in the pound, deducted from army pay. After 1847 it was supported by money voted by Parliament.

Originally designed by Sir Christopher Wren, the buildings were extended in the 18th century and there are also modern additions. The site covers 66 acres. There is



accommodation for almost 400 Pensioners who surrender their army pension in return for board, lodging, clothing and medical care when they enter. On entering men must be reasonably fit and able to look after themselves, but care is given subsequently with age and infirmity. An army hierarchy is maintained in the wards and InPensioners may choose to volunteer to work as clerks, guides, chapel staff, Gardeners etc.

Everyday uniform is blue, but it is the scarlet dress uniform with its brass buttons and distinctive tricorne hat which registers with the public, especially on parade at the Remembrance Service in the Royal Albert Hall.

All organisations must move with the times and Chelsea is no exception; consideration is being given to the possibility of admitting women who have served in the army.

Regular celebrations include Oak Apple Day, Founder's Day, Spring Sunday, the Cheese Ceremony and the Cake Ceremony. The Pensioners have a high profile and are a visible reminder to a younger generation of how our future was secured.

Pleased at the interest the Society showed, and their wish to visit the Royal Hospital, Major Corrigan invited members of the Committee to pay a preliminary visit to the Spring Festival Service, held this year on Palm Sunday, 31st March in the Chapel. This resplendent building, completed by Wren in 1687 in reminiscent of that at Greenwich provided for retired sailors. The InPensioners paraded before the service, and the Committee was received by Major Corrigan, resplendent in uniform and wearing a cocked hat mounted with plumes of swans' feathers.

Subsequently the Society visited in body and also included a visit to the Army Museum nearby. Interesting as this was to see displays of weapons, medals and memorabilia, the most impressive - and indeed, the most disturbing sight was the reconstruction of trenches in the First World War. The noise, the smells, the vermin, brought home as no words can do the experiences and sacrifices made by members of the armed forces, and emphasises Major Corrigan's original assessment - these men are the Nation's Conscience.

Bess Dzielski .

## **ARISTOCRATS AND BANKERS BESIDE THE THAMES**

April the 13th, 1996 dawned bright and sunny, so it was a very cheerful party that boarded the coach from Sidcup that morning for a day out. We headed for Middlesex, north of the Thames, but did not take the boring motorway route. Our trusty driver, Gordon, took us instead on a very interesting journey through London so there were plenty of historic sights and buildings to look out for on the way.

The Ranger's House on Blackheath was the first place of interest, then we continued until reaching the river and turned left along the south bank. After passing Battersea Park, we crossed the River Thames by Battersea Bridge and found ourselves on Chelsea Embankment and eagerly looked out for the lovely houses on Cheyne Walk, many of which had been the homes of famous writers and artists. There was a great display of blue plaques to be seen, some houses having two on their facade. Among those who lived here were Marc Brunel and his son Isambard, James Whistler, Hilaire Belloc, George Eliot, Mrs Gaskell, Thomas Carlyle and Daniel Gabriel Rossetti, all of whom were commemorated by plaques. Further on we passed Chelsea Hospital, home of the Pensioners. We also saw, away to the right, the tall tower of the Kew Bridge Steam Museum. The drive along that part of Thames was delightful, with



many attractive houseboats and stretches of open parkland by the water. A little later we turned on to the Great West Road where some of the factory buildings of the 1930's are still to be seen - Gillette, Hoover etc. The Hogarth roundabout came next (Hogarth's house on the left) then we were in Isleworth and soon arrived at our first stately home of the day, Syon House.

A break for coffee and scones refreshed us after the journey and we were ready for a guided tour of the house. Our guide was excellent with a thorough knowledge of the history of Syon and its owners. It began in 1415 as a religious house of the Bridgettine Order and was named after the hill in the Holy Land, then with the suppression of the monasteries, Syon Abbey became Crown property. In 1547 the estate was owned by the Duke of Somerset who started building a house, the shell of which now forms the present building. It then came into the ownership of the Duke of Northumberland and still belongs to that family. We saw the great state rooms, much painted and gilded, with the Adam furniture. It was magnificent. The guide was so enthusiastic that our visit over-ran and we had to forgo the last two or three rooms in order to have lunch and see some of the gardens! There are acres of grounds to explore but we made for the Great Conservatory - a most beautiful building - and it is believed that Joseph Paxton studied it before designing the Crystal Palace. Inside we found banks of spring flowers, including some glorious camellias. A real photo opportunity! Some of the party visited the garden centre and returned with boxes of plants which were stowed in the luggage hold of the coach. After a short walk round part of the formal garden, it was time for the short drive to our second stately home of the day, Osterley Park.

On leaving the coach park we had a delightful walk past lakes and through trees. The approach gave a fine view of the house with its great portico fronted by a row of six pillars. Osterley does not actually stand on the banks of the Thames, as does Syon, but appears to do so thanks to the long ribbon of water winding through the meadows. This is a string of ponds linked by the River Brent, and added great attraction to a gentleman's Estate - apparently it was considered an essential part of the scenery to have a river flowing past the house. The building of Osterley was begun in the 1560's by the banker Sir Thomas Gresham, and replaced an earlier farmhouse. It must have been completed by 1576 as Queen Elizabeth visited the house that year, when Gresham entertained her and the Court with Sonnets, Songs and a play. Apparently she considered the forecourt too large! The Estate passed through several families until bought by Sir Francis Child, another banker, in 1713. He died shortly afterwards but his family continued the ownership until 1793. They used Osterley purely for entertaining, spending the rest of their time in London. Therefore the interior of the house is meant to impress with its richness, and indeed the State rooms must have been very splendid. A painting by Rubens was fixed to the ceiling over the Grand Stairs, but what we see now is a copy. Robert Adam worked on designs for Osterley as he had for Syon. In 1793 Lady Sarah Fane, a granddaughter of the last of the Child family, inherited Osterley at the age of eight. When she came of age in 1806, she was married to the Earl of Jersey, and this family continued ownership until 1949, when the ninth Earl gave Osterley to the National Trust. Nearby is the beautiful old Stable Block, and here we were very happy to find our tea! We were all somewhat footsore and weary by then and the pots of tea and plates of excellent cake were much appreciated. There was still a little time left in which to explore the National Trust shop before walking back to the coach.



The drive home passed quickly, Gordon taking the motorway route, and we arrived back in Sidcup tired but with happy memories of a great day out - once again due to expert organisation. Three cheers for Frances and Gill.

Joan Seymour

## SERVANTS OF THE CHURCH

For centuries churchwardens have run the parish, people and buildings. Bess Dzielski explains their role today.

In the past a churchwarden was recognised as a figure of authority and gravitas. They still have legal responsibilities as the Bishop's officer in the parish, but the job has also become a magnet for everything which cannot be assigned elsewhere.

Wardens worry about leaking roofs, money, heating systems and oil deliveries, fire extinguishers, repairing church halls and vicarages, getting the parish magazine to the printers and soothing irate parishioners. Plus any other problem which arises. Then they worry about finding enough help to carry out the work.

Churchwardens who may be of either sex, exist only in the Church of England. They're the principal lay officers of the parish, the legal guardians of all church property and responsible for its upkeep.

Election is annually by parishioners on the church's electoral roll and candidates must be communicants. The term of office is for one year, but at least a couple of years are needed to grow into the job and many wardens continue in the post for longer.

Most importantly, they are responsible for the orderly administration of the services, aided by their assistants, the sidesmen, who hand out hymn and prayer books and take the collection. Wardens may assign seats in church and they have the power to arrest anyone who creates a disturbance during divine service. In the absence of clergy they may conduct a service but not, of course, celebrate Holy Communion.

In addition to local functions they are also the Bishop's officers, having a duty to report on parish affairs. They do not officially take up their post until after the Visitation, which the Bishop usually delegates to an Archdeacon. At the service held for all wardens in the Archdeaconry, the newly-elected swear to 'faithfully and diligently perform the duties of their office'.

At the end of each year the outgoing wardens report on all aspects of church life during their term of office - from numbers on the electoral roll, services held, finance and insurance, to mission work and outreach to the local community.

When the Bishop visits the parish they attend him, carrying their staves of office as they precede him in procession. Now purely ceremonial, in the past these staves were meant to defend the Bishop from the unruly mob.

The most responsible time for wardens is during an interregnum - the period between the departure of one vicar and the installation of his successor - when the wardens become the sequestrators of the parish. This means they are responsible for continuity, ensuring that visiting clergy take services and perform the rites of baptism, marriage and funerals.

Wardens have a specific responsibility for vicars and their welfare, and they look to wardens for counsel and advice. Difficulties can occur even in the happiest of congregations, but the warden's knowledge of church members can resolve a great



deal. If serious disagreements occur the warden can consult the Archdeacon or Bishop.

The office goes back to medieval times when the parish was the unit of civil administration and life revolved around the church. The earliest church wardens' accounts begin in 1347 and enough survives from the 15th century onwards to show the wardens' increasing responsibility for all church and rural affairs. Traditionally wardens took care of money needed for church buildings, screens, stained glass and murals. They also provided apprenticeships for pauper children, organised parish fire-fighting, provided a bier for the dead, saw to poor relief and repairs to roads, and paid for the destruction of vermin.

After the Reformation, the Royal Injunctions of 1538 laid new burdens on the wardens by ordering registers of baptisms, marriages and burials to be maintained, along with the provision and safe-keeping of the Parish Chest, which held important documents. Parish registers and churchwardens' accounts are now the most reliable and informative records of English life over 500 years. The wardens' secular functions were only finally dissolved by the Local Government Act of 1894.

The current concerns of wardens are mostly financial, arising from the Church Commissioners' Losses. But neither are they immune to the present heart searching in the Church of England over issues such as women's ordination, homosexual clergy, the charismatic movement and the new Alternative Service Book, due to be published in 2000.

The church hierarchy certainly understands warden power. There's an in-joke among senior clergy which says, "when you become an Archdeacon you must rewrite your theology. Remember to use Faculty instead of Gospel, Chancellor instead of God and when you hear the word 'churchwarden' you genuflect".

*Bess originally wrote this article for the magazine Active Life. She has been for some years the churchwarden of Holy Redeemer, Days Lane and John Mercer is in the same capacity at St. John's, Sidcup, both churches being within our local history area. You now know what these two very busy people do in their spare time!*

## SUMMER WALKS

The 1995/6 Local History programme ended on the same tone that had been maintained throughout - with three varied, informative and enjoyable walks.

The evening of the 5th June saw about thirty members gather in warm sunshine at The Stables at Footscray Meadows. We were met by two Borough Rangers who each led a group either side of the River Cray. History and nature mingled as we learned of the Footscray Place Estate of the past and also how today the Meadows are maintained and flora and fauna encouraged. A mother duck proudly escorted her ducklings along the river, to everyone's delight, whilst in the background we were treated to the bellringing of All Saints Church. This member at least, hadn't realised the extent of Footscray Meadows. At times it was easy to believe we were in the heart of the country.

Royal Eltham was the next walk, on 19th June. A slightly overcast evening this, but the rain held off. Not deterred, at least fifty members met our guide John Kennett, (introduced by Frances as 'Mr. Eltham'), at the Tilt Yard by Eltham Palace. From there we headed towards the High Street, passing several interesting sites on the way.



How many people know that the artist, Rex Whistler was born in Eltham and that his father designed the large house in front of the Palace? John carefully pointed out the changes that have taken place on Eltham Hill and transported us back to the early years of the century. At the church we were shown a plaque to Mr. Doggett, (of Doggett's Coat and Badge Race fame) and the grave of an aborigine, as well as hearing about the history of the church and its architecture. Then surprise, surprise, ten minutes walk from the noise of traffic and we were looking at fields and a panorama of London's skyline in the distance. A leafy walk brought us back to the glory of Eltham Palace.

Our final walk was different again. This time it was into the country on 3rd July - to Horton Kirby. Despite a chill in the air, about twenty five members wound their way to the meeting point. As the Local History Society of Horton Kirby was having its AGM that evening, we used their informative leaflet to explore. (But Frances and Gill had done one of their famous recces first!) Horton Kirby boasts many old and picturesque buildings and was a revelation to many members. Most was the Elizabethan Franks Hall, now owned by a publishing company. Set in the rolling Darent Valley, Horton Kirby felt many more miles from Sidcup than six. Sadly, what were missing from this pretty village, were the village shop and Post Office - a sign of the times. At the end of a most enjoyable walk, several members went to the village hall at the invitation of Horton Kirby Local History Society, to join them for a cup of tea and learn about life in what sounded like a closely knit community.

Mary Gilhooly

### AN EARLY COACH ACCIDENT

'Motor Coach Overturns', '31 People Thrown Into Ditch', 'Canon's Wife Hurt', 'Sidcup Party's Alarming Experience'.

Newspaper headlines describing another motorway accident? Or did it happen when speeds were lower and roads much less congested? The accident led to an action for damages in the High Court, Kings Bench Division and was widely reported in the local and national press. This article is based on the verbatim reports of the accident and of the court case.

Let us go back to Thursday, 11th July 1929, the day of the summer outing of the Mother's Meeting of St. John's Church, Sidcup to Hastings. There 64 people travelling in two motor coaches hired from Horace Cliff of Well Hall Road, Eltham. In the second coach were 32 people, including the driver, Canon and Mrs. Spurgin and several children. Apart from Canon Spurgin (my great uncle and vicar of Sidcup) the only other men in the party were the curate, Rev. Underhill and the verger, Mr. Murless, both in the first coach.

All went well as far as Lamberhurst on the present A21, where they stopped for refreshments. Starting again they reached Stone Crouch, just before Flimwell and about 18 miles from Hastings. Eye-witnesses described the road as 'a narrow lane' with second coach travelling behind the first at about 15-20 miles per hour. Canon and Mrs. Spurgin were seated on the off-side behind the driver, with Mrs. Spurgin on the inside seat. Suddenly a van came round the corner, bearing the name of J. Sainsbury. The van went by 'like a flash' and the coach veered on to the verge, where there was a wide ditch about 10 feet deep. The coach cut into a nut tree, struck a stay of a telegraph pole and went over. Nearly all the glass broke and most of the



passengers received cuts and bruises. Mrs. Spurgin was hurt much more seriously, since she was thrown out, her head struck the ground and she turned a complete somersault. The Canon was also badly shaken. The accident was seen from the first coach which stopped and the passengers ran back to give help. The driver of a Bluebell coach travelling from London also stopped and organised relief work. A phone call was made to a local doctor who dressed the cuts and advised that Mrs. Spurgin should rest in a hayfield before being carried on an improvised stretcher to a nearby house. An ambulance was then called from Sidcup which took her home. A relief coach was provided and the party, with the exception of Canon and Mrs. Spurgin, continued their journey after resting at the Royal Oak Hotel, Ticehurst. Mrs. Spurgin's left shoulder blade was broken and her spine was found to be severely injured but unbroken. She had to remain in bed for five weeks, being confined to her room for two months. Consequently she took legal action 'against Horace Cliff, motor coach proprietor and J. Sainsbury Ltd. for personal injuries sustained through the negligence of one or the other defendant or both'. At the time of the court hearing in Nov. 1930, 16 months after the accident, she was only just able to resume some of her parish work, was far from physically fit and suffered pain in her neck and at the bottom of her spine. Her expenses amounted to £242 (about £11,000 today).

During the hearing, before judge and jury, various witnesses stated that the van was travelling near the middle of the road and if the coach driver had not pulled on to the verge there would have been a head-on collision. Even when the coach was on the verge the van passed very close to it. The counsel for Mr. Cliff maintained that 'the one and only person to blame for the accident was the driver of Sainsbury's van. He drove his van recklessly'.

The driver of the wrecked coach, Frederick Mahood, 'formerly in the employment of the defendant Cliff of Eltham' said that when the van pulled out to avoid a pedestrian he was forced on to the grass verge. The van was 'travelling at a rapid pace' and he applied the handbrake 'but before it could act the coach had turned over'. He also said 'he had not applied his brakes till he struck the stay' (of the telegraph pole) as he had no intention of going on the verge.

The driver of the first coach, S. Parker 'saw Sainsbury's van coming from Flimwell. It was travelling fast' He considered 'the van driver was not taking the necessary precautions' and 'the van was taking more of the road than it should have'. Not unexpectedly the counsel for Sainsbury's 'submitted that the accident was entirely due to the driver of the motor coach, who should have pulled up when he got to the grass verge and not have gone on'.

John Boyce, the driver of the van passed the scene of the accident at about 10.30am. He had no recollection of seeing the motor coach in question on the verge, or of pulling out to pass a pedestrian. But there was a pedestrian, Mr. E. Wells who was walking along the road presumably on the same side as the van. He said that 'when he saw Sainsbury's van coming he stepped on to the grass. After it had passed he stepped again into the road and saw the van pass the coach. The front nearside wheel of the coach was on the grass verge and the driver was trying to put on his brakes, but they would not hold. When they did hold and the coach was at a standstill, it turned over'. Cross examined, he said, 'the coach swerved to avoid the van, and that it carried it on to the verge'.

In due course the jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff for £1000 against both defendants, and his Lordship entered judgement for the plaintiff for £1000 and costs. The judgement seems reasonable in sharing the blame between the two defendants,

although the onus should have been on the van driver for forcing the coach on to the verge in the first place.

The accident might have been avoided if the coach driver had reacted more quickly and applied his handbrake sooner or better still used the footbrake as well, assuming it was working! Again, all would have been well if the van driver had paused until the coach had gone by before pulling out to pass the pedestrian, which would have meant driving more slowly in the narrow part of the road. He seems to have been quite oblivious of the accident and presumably did not have a rear-view mirror! Incidentally the A21 is still two-way but wider where the accident occurred, just before a dual carriageway section.

No report has been found of the police being involved, either at the time or after the accident and the ambulance was called all the way from Sidcup, although the doctor was local. The emergency services seem to have been involved on a do-it-yourself basis much more than today! It seems that the driver of the wrecked coach left his job after the accident, whether by resignation or sacking is not known. However, thanks to the long period of rest after the accident, Mrs. Spurgin eventually made a complete recovery and lived to the grand age of 95. Her award of £1000 would now have been worth £45000.

John Seymour







Mr Morris married Jan Meddle  
moved to The Arkleys