ANGELA 13

Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 1997

LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

CONTENTS OF AUTUMN OF 1997 NEWSLETTER

Page No.1	Editorial	Frances Oxley
Page No.1	Society Happenings	Frances Oxley
Page No.3	An Appreciation of the Red House	Mary Gilhooly
Page No.5	A Note from Bess	Bess Dzielski
Page No.5	Local History from a Photographic Ledger	John Mercer
Page No.6	From Abbey to Chateau	Joan Seymour
Page No.7	A Memory of Rose Bruford	Frances Oxley
Page No.8	Photos of George Bernard Shaw	Joyce Ilett
Page No.9	A Nice Easy Day on Sheppey	John Seymour
Page No.11	The Drapers Shop	Malcolm Youngs
Page No.13	An Early Sidcup Resident	John Seymour
Page No.15	Visit to Frogmore and Savill Gardens	Gill Brown
Page No.15	The Crystal Palace	Phyllis Parker
Page No.16	A Working Girl's Memories	June Hughes
Page No.20	Thoughts on Suffolk (By Lilias August as expressed for her water -colour exhibition)	The Editor

The articles in this newsletter (with one exception) 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 - 1997

I have been typing the newsletter during the second half of August, with virtually, only my already prepared editorial to be placed on the disk. It has been discarded as events have overtaken me and I feel I should offer the following in its stead.

Sunday, the 31st August, will be one of those days that will be implanted in people's memories for the rest of their lives. Some people had, as usual on a Saturday, stayed up until the early hours with either the television or radio on, so heard the first reports of that terrible motor crash in Paris that took the life of Princess Diana and others in the car.

My own experience of hearing the news was quite different...We were expecting to see my sister's carer for the first time after her Mediterranean holiday. I opened the front door at 7.30pm to an ashen faced younger lady, who after a while told me of the terrible news that she had heard on the radio in the houses she had visited prior to us. I immediately turned our radio on - I didn't disbelieve her - but, I still needed confirmation - I think because we had been so bombarded over the last few weeks of the Princess in a happy, holiday mood.

It was obvious that our newspaper was not going to be delivered so I went round to the shop in Halfway Street only to meet Gill who at that moment had just seen the newspaper headline and was incredulous. I later telephoned Janet Woods as we were due to attend a function that afternoon and she told me that her daughter had been one of those up all night listening as the bulletins came through. As I said in my opening remarks, the Princess's death will be remembered in the same way, we always remember where we were, when the announcement of the assassination of John F.Kennedy came through.

Certainly, both well known throughout the world and certainly charismatic personalities in their own way.

This will be a time, that will be remembered, of the Nation being united in it's grief.

Frances Oxley Hon.Editor

SOCIETY HAPPENINGS

Just after Christmas we had the sad news that Alan Bland died on 27th December. Five members attended his funeral service at the United Reformed Church at Bexley Village. Due to the good offices of Dorothy Down, who collects her, Doris Bland has picked up the threads and been to society meetings.

We were all devastated went Bess Dzielski went seriously down hill after having what she had been told was a minor operation. She was continually in our thoughts and praise be, has come through the tunnel and is back attending meetings again. She has written to you all, further along, in the newsletter

Dear Phyllis Nash has been very unwell lately - I had her particularly in mind when this year we toured St.Albans and Waddesdon - she arranged some years ago a very fine tour of St.Albans, which took in the site of Verulamium. Our good wishes to you, Phyllis.

Mary Gilhooly after having worked terribly hard, has gained her BA Degree

The Society's thanks must go to a trio who prepared the photographic project of Sidcup's Shops for presentation to Local Studies, Hall Place. The members involved were Norman Buller, Roy Cole and his wife, Dawn, spending many hours in the evenings on the presentation. Norman was able to hand the work personally to Stuart Bligh, Manager of Local Studies who was very pleased to accept the project.
We seemed to monopolise Hall Place over the winter period as a small group was given a guided tour by Dr.Rosemary Evans in November and in January our newest members were given the 'low-down' on making the most of archive material housed there.
Members participating this year in the lecture programme were John Mercer on Lord Castlereagh and myself on basic heraldry.
We thank Martin Watts. Shirley Watts, Janice Fairweather and Pauline Matkins for the quiz that went so well at the Christmas Social and Martin for the ramble (and hill climbing!) he led round Pratts Bottom.
Alan Godfrey has put his ideas to the Society on everyone's participation in a project for the millennium. He wishes us to produce a total picture of life in Sidcup as we go towards the millennium. I understand that he has already received some work but we do need all of you to come up with something! Get your thinking caps on please!
Gill and I were pleased that the first weekday visit we have organised got such a good response. I am referring to our tour of Frogmore and the Savill Garden.
Our treasurer, Jack Saunders, is in Queen Mary's as a result of a heart attack on 27th August. He is now up and about but is due to be hospitalised in London for tests. We wish him well for the future. Co-incidentally, I learnt that Dorothy Down had been through the same experience some weeks back, having been in Queen Mary's and then St.Thomas's Hospital. I telephoned her and she said that she is doing more each day but it is a slow progress. She intends to be with us on our first evening in September!
Frances Oxley - Hon.Secretary.

OBITUARY - MR.ALAN BLAND

It is now nine months since one of our members , Alan Bland, died unexpectedly on 27th December, 1996. He and his Wife, Doris enjoyed the Society and were interested in all aspects of Local History - not least our Outings! Some years ago, my late husband became involved with Alan with the running of the Youth Club at the Congregational Church and our friendship developed from that time. Alan & Doris introduced us to the delights of camping. It was unfortunate that our first night under canvas there was a violent thunderstorm but our friendship survived. Amongst his other hobbies, Alan was keen on Lapidary. We occasionally joined an expedition to look for what to most people were coloured stones, whilst enjoying his expert knowledge. On a personal note, I knew I could call at any time with a problem. Alan's reaction was immediate -"I'll come" - and he did - complete with tools. It was the same for other people, Alan would always help. This 'Gentleman' is greatly missed.
Dorothy Down.

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AN APPRECIATION OF THE RED HOUSE
BY MARY GILHOOLY

The Red House, 'a poem in bricks', has been described as 'the first private house of the new artistic culture, the first house to be conceived and built as a unified whole inside and out'.(1) It was the first major commission of architect Philip Webb, who built it in the vernacular style for his newly married friend William Morris, in 1859, in Kentish orchards at Bexleyheath. The date is still visible on the weather-vane which carries Morris's initials too. The significance of the house lies in its disputed place as a turning point in domestic architecture. It is according to some critics a proto-modernist work; it is indisputably a living demonstration of Morris's ideology.

Like much of Morris's work, the house was constructed as a protest against the values of the age, the impetus being his desire to have surroundings conducive to a life which was both socially and aesthetically satisfying. He felt that he could only attain this, through designing them himself or have them designed by his friends. The plan of the house does indeed conform exactly to Pugin's 'true principles', as the form is shaped by the arrangement of rooms and their relation to one another. The scheme is, in fact hierarchically expressed particularly in the fenestration. As Hollamby remarks: 'windows of different shape, type and size express with brilliant clarity the plan form behind them'. Its name, adhering also to Pugin's philosophy, denotes the use of local red brickwork in an age of yellow stucco.

The attraction of the Red House, today, is its synthesis of art and architecture and its air of romanticism, as well as its role in the genesis of the firm of Morris & Co. It is even thought that Morris may have chosen this site because it was close to the route taken by Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury, which would appeal to his love of the medieval period. He called the garden porch "The Pilgrim's Rest".

What is striking is the relationship between house and garden emphasised by the latter being structured architecturally, and the irregular roof line of the house giving the impression of merging organically from the site. The suggestion is that they were designed as one, in line with Morris's exhortation in his lecture "Making The Best Of It" that the garden ought to be part of the house. The focal point of the garden is the conical shaped well, reminiscent of a Kentish oast house, which not only provided water for the house but also had an historical, social connotation, in epitomising the medieval meeting place.

The functionalism of the house is apparent from the design, but equally important is the symbolism it relays. For example, the large north porch with side benches and wide door expresses its obvious role, but it is also symbolic of invitation and welcome. The whole ethos of Red House derived from its function as a working community as well as a home. The passages looking into the court are suggestive of a cloister, in line with Morris's romantic idea of 'living on a monastic plan'.

Morris's theories on the simplicity of furnishing a house are apparent in the interior. As he himself said, 'if we want art to begin at home, as it must, we must clear our houses of troublesome superfluities'.(2) Indeed, the inside mirrors the outside in terms of simplicity and limited gothic ornament. The essence of Morris's lecture is captured by the massive wooden staircase, with exposed treads and risers and huge pinnacled newel posts, from which the house radiates. The theme is continued throughout with brick gothic arches, exposed beams and plain walls displaying an honest use of materials, as well as being aesthetically satisfying.

Although each room has a different function, there is a sense of unity throughout. Even what used to be the servants quarters are related to the whole, at a time when they were usually relegated to basement and attic. In line with Morris's socialist theories the original kitchen faces west and contains a large window. A decorative feature which enhances the integration is apparent in many of the ceilings, including those in the hall, which were pricked out in patterns taken from medieval designs before the plaster had set, to enable ease of re-painting. This demonstrates the functional aspect of Morris's thinking as well as creating a cohesive effect.

The Red House is a surviving reminder of Morris's earliest practical designs and illustrates. in microcosm, examples of work for which the Firm was later to be renowned. Stained Glass in the corridor to the garden porch contains patterned quarries by Morris and Burne-Jones. Notable amongst which are allegories of Love and Fate, pre-figuring their later windows for churches. Lethaby suggests that these stained glass panels 'were probably the first of their kind in modern domestic building'. What must be some of the earliest known examples of tiles designed by Morris, line the seat in the back porch. As well as historic interest they provide insight into Morris's character as they contain his family crest and motto 'Si Je Puis'.

Several pieces of early Morris furniture survive, intact, intimating a sense of his occupancy. A huge cupboard in the hall incorporating a seat, is attributed to Philip Webb. It is painted with scenes from the Niebelungenlied, tantalisingly unfinished, and variously ascribed to Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Morris. More typical of Webb's work are the built-in bedroom cupboards which are solid, undecorated and handsome. Webb is also responsible for the dresser in the dining room, with its three gothic arches, lacquered in Morris's 'dragon's blood' red. It is completely serviceable, like the house itself, planned to hold every domestic utensil from trays to cutlery.

A most interesting item is the settle in the drawing room, the room Morris intended to make 'the most beautiful room in England.(3) One of the few pieces that Morris actually designed for Red Lion Square, it was adapted for Red House, by Webb, who added the canopy as a 'minstrel's gallery' reached by a ladder, giving access to the loft. This remarkable piece demonstrates 'Webb's and Morris's ability to combine practicality with romance'. Other features in the drawing room are the brick hooded Butterfieldian style chimney piece, foreshadowing the Queen Anne revival; also, the dais alcove with oriel window and window seat in true medieval style, whose practical function is to let in light on a north facing room. This room also contains unique works of art in the three wall paintings by Edward Burne-Jones depicting the medieval romance of Sir Degrevaint with Morris and his wife portrayed as the King and Queen. Besides being engaging as a Pre-Raphaelite art, they also give some indication of how Morris intended the walls of the house to look, had he stayed.

The Red House is imbued with the spirit of the early romantic ideals of the Pre-Raphaelites, for a return to the human values of the middle ages. It also manages to convey the values of Morris and his vision of future Britain as portrayed in his **News from Nowhere ;** where art and harmony with nature have triumphed. It may be seen as a milestone in Nineteenth century art and architecture; for besides being an intensely romantic house it is at the same time highly functional and practical.

References:-

1. Muthesias, The English House p17
2 Morris, The Beauty of Life, Cole p561
3 Hollamby, The Red House p29

The preceding article represents the work that Mary put forward for her degree. We have visited the Red House on several occasions and some twenty of us will have the pleasure in October of paying yet another visit, with this time, the added bonus of Mary's article.

A NOTE FROM BESS..................

This may seem very belated but it's the first real opportunity I have had to thank members for their kindness and concern over my unexpected sojourn in Queen Mary's Hospital last winter. I had cards, visits and presents from many of you - particularly enjoyable was the little notebook with good wishes and signatures which Anne Brunton brought up after the Christmas social. Perhaps it is not invidious to mention Frances's regular visits to keep me up to date with the Society's affairs and Eric's supply of newspapers and sweets. I really did appreciate your thoughtfulness - and so did my long-suffering family who had a far worse time of it than I did. Once again, my thanks.
Bess Dzielski

LOCAL HISTORY FROM A PHOTOGRAPHIC LEDGER
BY JOHN MERCER

During the years 1898 to 1902 the photographic business of Kellaway at 82, High Street, Sidcup, kept a ledger of orders. This sheds fascinating light on some of the local inhabitants at those times. On July 20th 1898, a Miss Bailey ordered one dozen prints care of Lady Twysden. Now Lady Twysden lived in a house of some size where the Schweppes factory is now to be found. On 4th August the Misses Stewart and Hemmings order prints and gave their address as North Cray Place. They could have been guests or they could have been servants. A little later in the year Captain Van Sittart of North Cray Place, places an order. He was the owner and he wanted a plate made of the house and water. The water was presumably Five Arches. On October 1st the Hon.Mrs.Marsham Townshend of Frognal wants three prints made from her own films. Foots Cray Place comes into the order book by way of a Miss Price of the laundry on October 6th. A Miss Nicholls orders some prints care of a formerly well known shopkeeper, Mr.Popplewell. Was she a draper's assistant ? Did she live in? In November of the same year, orders from Miss Collins of Marlborough House School. This stood where the present St.Joseph and St. Mary's School is to be found. Was she a domestic or a teacher. On December the 19th the Revd.Bourne of the Manse, Hadlow Road, asked for some photography. He was the Methodist minister. Where was the Coffee Tavern, Sidcup? A Miss Dennis placed an order in June 1899, while in the same month Mr Bowen of the Forge (the one in Cross Road?) had work to be done. Miss Nicholls of the Cottage Hospital in Granville Road (not long opened) and surely a nurse, placed an order in the October as did Miss Broadley of 3, Ursula Lodges. Ursula Lodges had been founded by the Berens Family in 1844 to provide a home for retired gentlewomen (i.e. governesses). Mr Hanson, the chemist at the corner of Hadlow Road and the High Street wanted photographs taken. To those older Sidcup folk, this shop is still remembered as Hanson's. By 1901, the Waring Family were in Foots Cray Place. Mrs Waring placed some orders on Jan.5th 1901. In June, Mr.Martin, the stonemason who lived in Adelaide House wanted some prints. The house still stands close to the

Fire Station. On March 5th, 1902 , Mrs Bowden placed an order. She lived in St.John's Institute which was in Birkbeck Road. It had been founded as a community centre with a public laundry. The buildings are still there and the house is let off into flats. A nice touch to end with. Mrs.Boyce of North Cray School wanted numerous pictures of the May Queen group and also the Hay Drill (whatever that might be!). The school closed some years ago and is converted into two houses. There are many other entries in the ledger but these seemed to be the most interesting to extract.

My thanks are due to Miss E.M.Kellaway for the loan of the ledger and her encouragement to make use of it.

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FROM ABBEY TO CHATEAU
BY JOAN SEYMOUR

Despite the weather being dull and wet, we enjoyed a truly great day out on April 26th 1997, leaving Sidcup at around 8.30am by coach driven by 'Little John'. We arrived at St.Albans after an interesting journey by way of the Blackwall Tunnel and M11. We made for the Abbey Refectory for coffee and fresh hot scones before starting to explore the great building. It proved to be an 'Open Day' of the Abbey which meant that all 25 guides were on duty and whenever one wanted to ask for information, there was a guide on hand to supply the answer!

First of all, who was St.Alban? According to the Venerable Bede, Alban was a citizen of Verulamium, a pagan who gave shelter to a fugitive from persecution. The fugitive was a Christian and Alban became so impressed by the man's prayers that he sought instruction from him. He accepted the Christian faith, and disguised the fugitive in his own distinctive cloak which enabled the man to escape. The man was later known as Amphibalus which apparently means 'cloak' in Latin. Alban was brought before the town magistrates and refused to recognise the pagan gods of Rome. As Christianity was forbidden in the Roman Empire he was condemned to death and executed on the hill where the great church now stands. This took place in c.AD209 so Alban became the first Christian martyr and the site gained a reputation for healing and became a centre for pilgrimage. Early in the 8th century a monastic church was built, and the rule of St.Benedict was established in AD793. By the 12th century it was the largest church in England, and from 1553 to 1870 the Lady Chapel was used as a grammar school for boys. After this the Lady Chapel reverted to church use and the Church became a Cathedral in 1877. The Lady Chapel is now used as the Parish Church.

The tomb of St..Alban is behind the High Altar in its own chapel and is most impressive, the casket covered in a beautiful gold-embroidered red cloth. However, it does not contain the saint's bones any longer. We were told they disappeared a long time ago. Among other impressive things to see were the remarkable 14th century Flemish brass of Abbott, Thomas de la Mare, the painted wooden ceiling of the presbytery and some splendid embroidered altar frontals. The Abbey also had a well stocked book shop.

After a refreshing lunch in the Refectory, we regained our coach and continued on our way to Waddesdon Manor which is now a property of the National Trust (since 1988), where we spent the afternoon. It seemed that we drove a mile or two through the grounds before reaching the Manor but the first sight of it was most striking, as it appears as a French Chateau straight from the Loire! There was even a terrace overlooking the gardens which had a large pond with a great statuesque fountain in the centre. A guide came to the coach to welcome us, and on entering the Manor we were

told its history and guided round the first two rooms, after which we were free to roam at will. In the 18th century there were five Rothschild brothers who settled throughout Europe, in Frankfurt, Vienna, London, Naples & Paris. The family crest is a red shield (rot schild in German) pierced by five arrows representing the brothers. Waddesdon was built by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in 1874-1889, mainly to house his enormous collection of antique French furniture and porcelain, also a varied collection of clocks of all sizes. Much of the furniture and wall panelling was inlaid with complicated designs as well as gilded which made it all rather overpowering! The mass of porcelain, mostly Sevres and Meissen, was memorable and some of it was very beautiful There were some large crystal chandeliers made doubly impressive by their reflections in mirrors. Waddesdon is a very big house and by the time we reached the second floor we were delighted to find plenty of soft seats! In this room was an interesting collection of family photographs showing the history of the Manor, its occupants and some of the estate workers. It also provided a fine view of the gardens. Having seen the interior, it was pleasant to walk in the grounds and take some photos as the rain had eased by late afternoon. The gift shop was worth a visit and seemed well patronised, not forgetting the adjacent wine shop which stocked wine from the Rothschild vineyards. We noticed a very pleasant little red wine - priced at a mere £417 a bottle.

A cream tea was provided in the Stables and was most welcome, especially the pots of tea! Together with lively conversation it was a pleasant end to our visit to Waddesdon Manor. We boarded the coach much refreshed for the homeward journey, which took us through the attractive countryside of the Chiltern Hills by way of some lovely villages such as The Chalfonts (St.Giles and St.Peter) and Denham. In spite of the rain which was falling once more it was a very pretty drive. We arrived back in Sidcup at about 7pm, tired but with many happy memories of a splendid day out thanks to all the organisation and work put into it by Frances and Gill - not forgetting our driver, "Little John".

MEMORY OF ROSE BRUFORD
BY FRANCES OXLEY

My history tutor at Crayford, Mrs Ann Stott, mentioned one evening that she had attended some years ago the funeral service of Rose Bruford, not because she knew her within the drama fraternity, but due to their both being Quakers. I never met Rose Bruford as I only moved to the area in 1975, so for me, it was only the painting of her at the top of the staircase at Lamorbey that gave me any clue to her personality. Mrs Stott went on to say that Rose's father was a strict Quaker and made her promise not to be an actress, so she went on to found a drama school instead. At the end of her life she lived quietly with her brother, Leonard, so much so, that Mrs Stott did not realise there was anything special about her! She was a member of the Sevenoaks Quaker Meeting. Had she been alive today, I am sure she would be proud of the drama students of the Rose Bruford College who have climbed the dizzy heights of success, many being well known on stage, film and TV screen. The irony of course, of her father not wishing her to act, has meant that the family name of Bruford is well known throughout the acting world.

PHOTOS OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
A TALK GIVEN BY JOYCE ILETT ON MEMBERS' EVENING

As my step-brother Lionel and his wife both died recently leaving no family, I have been involved in clearing their house. They were the sort of people who never threw anything away so there were papers dating back some 50 years which all had to be gone through.

When I used to visit them I always looked at a framed photo on the wall of their dining room and I would say "He's still here then". It was a photograph of George Bernard Shaw. I supposed I liked to see it there because it reminded me of times just after the war, visiting Lionel's parents, in a cottage in Hertfordshire. Lionel had been in the RAF during the war but he was demobbed in 1945 and started working as a free-lance photographer. The day I remember visiting the cottage there were photos which Lionel had just developed himself all spread out to dry and they were all of Bernard Shaw. The cottage was at Ayot St.Peter and Shaw's House (Shaw's Corner) was in the next village, Ayot St.Lawrence. His parents told me how Lionel had asked if he could visit the great man and take photographs and rather surprisingly, Shaw agreed. I do not think he always liked unknown visitors but maybe he wanted to encourage a young man just starting out. I always thought Lionel had cycled over there because there were not many other means of transport at that time, but I don't know how he managed with his camera and any other equipment.

I had hoped I would keep the photo that was in the frame but a young relative had it who was also a photographer but he sent me copies of two photos.

However, when sorting through the papers I found an account that Lionel had written at the time of his visit to Shaw's house which I thought was quite interesting. It was just scribbled on the back of something else to save paper in those days. It read as follows:-

" Twenty five miles north of London, deep in Hertfordshire countryside lies the tiny village of Ayot St.Lawrence. There lives a man who is perhaps the greatest literary figure of this age. He is now 90 years old and his name is George Bernard Shaw. It was a wet blustery afternoon June afternoon that I went to photograph Mr.Shaw. His Irish housekeeper answered the door. 'Will Mr.Shaw mind posing out of doors, between the showers?' I asked. The lady was quite sure of her answer 'Goodness no. He goes out in all weathers - but what about your camera?' GBS rests every afternoon until 3.30 and as I was fifteen minutes early for my appointment I was shown into the study. It was quite a small room but I have seldom seen one so full of interest. In the centre of the room stood a tiny Chinese mosaic table upon which was a vase of heavy Californian poppies gently shedding their petals. A bookcase lined one side of the room. Half of it was occupied by the books of the Bible, each in a separate binding, whilst opposite there stood, as a companion set, the works of Shakespeare. There were memories of Shaw's friendships, one, a paper-covered Penguin of 'The Apprenticeship of Beatrice Webb' recalled Shaw's early Socialist activities, then a memory of a later friend, a charcoal sketch of Lawrence of Arabia standing his masterpiece, 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom'. I only saw one of Shaw's work, 'The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism' and there were two copies of it. In a corner stood a glass screen with greetings to Mr.Shaw in fourteen different Chinese languages. On the mantelpiece there was a delicate figure in Royal Worcester of Shakespeare and beside it an Oscar. The inscription read 'Presented to George Bernard Shaw for writing the screen-play of the film Pygmalion'. Scattered around the room were four busts of GBS. Two by Troubetskoy, one by Rodin and the last a plaster monstrosity made on

the set of Caesar and Cleopatra, a memento of Mr.Shaw's latest excursion into the cinema.
A quiet tap at the door and a most impressive figure stood there. He looked a very young 90 to me, tall and very straight, with a head of dazzling white hair and piercing blue eyes. Then in a very quiet Irish brogue he spoke, 'Please don't get up, I'll be with you in a moment'. When he returned he said, 'I can pose for you as long as you please'. He was both courteous and patient, it was difficult to realise how he had earned a reputation for brusqueness with interviewers.
The rain was streaming down the windows, but the sky was reasonably bright, and I managed to get two interior shots with a short exposure. GBS then indicated a portrait of himself, 'That's by Augustus John, I would like one taken beneath it.' The painting was of a much younger Shaw, complete with the bushy brows and the blazing beard. I set the camera up, but the daylight from the window cast an ugly reflection. I half closed the curtain to obliterate this, and as I had no lighting equipment I explained to Mr.Shaw the exposure would be a lengthy one. 'Don't worry' he said, 'I can sit still as long as you like, stop down a bit more if you wish'. He kept perfectly still, and when the exposure was finished I told him that was pretty good, not moving for twelve seconds. (His reply was 'I made it fifteen') His whole demeanour was of a man of sixty, in fact his only defect was a slight deafness. 'Speak up a little' was a frequent remark of his. Fortunately there was now a short break between the showers, although the wind was still gusty, so I suggested taking one or two more photographs in the garden. 'Of course' he said, and got his cape. He wished to be photographed in his air-raid helmet, for during the war Ayot-St-Lawrence had not been left in peace. Occasionally flying bombs that were destined for London strayed northwards, and it was one of these that had the temerity to explode within a mile of Mr.Shaw's house. Yes, there was a Shavian bomb story. The local air-raid-authorities had insisted that it was better to open wide all the windows in the house during a raid in order to minimise the amount of broken glass due to blast. Mr.Shaw was a little sceptical about this advice, nevertheless he opened them all but three. 'When the bomb fell', he said, 'all the windows were shattered, except of course the three that I left closed'.
He was just as patient standing outside in the wind as he had been in the house. We walked a little in the garden, and when we returned I began to pack my camera in preparation for leaving. The rain was now poring down heavier than ever, and as GBS shook hands and bid me goodbye, he said, 'Now don't go out until this has stopped, but please excuse me, I've got some work to do in the shed down the garden, I must finish it'. 'But this rain', I began. 'O don't bother, I just put on an old coat....Goodbye'
And he was gone".

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A NICE EASY DAY ON SHEPPEY, VISIT ON 7TH JUNE 1997
BY JOHN SEYMOUR

Our double-decker Kentishman Continental coach with 58 members aboard and ably driven by John, reached the Guildhall at Queenborough on the Isle of Sheppey in less than an hour. Early showers had dried up and the weather looked set fair. We met our guide for the day, Jonathan Fryer, who had previously spoken to the Society on 30th April. This talk had provided an admirable introduction to Sheppey and we were suitably impressed by the Council Chamber of the Guildhall where we were served coffee, kindly provided by members of the Sheppey Local History Society. Jonathan

opened his first talk of the day to us by saying that we would have a nice easy day on Sheppey and so it turned out for us but not for him! After summarising the day's programme we were introduced to some of the people portrayed on the walls of the chamber, notably one Thomas Greet who was the richest and most hated local worthy in the eighteenth century.

We then walked to the church of the Holy Trinity, where there were seats for all and where the Vicar was to have spoken to us. Unfortunately he had gone on a pilgrimage to Iona instead, so Jonathan stepped into the breach and told us about the foundation of Queenborough by Edward III, with the church being built around 1367 and the castle between 1361 and 1366. The town was named after his wife, Queen Philippa, and was intended to control the Thames and Medway estuaries against invaders and smugglers. Unfortunately Cromwell disapproved of the castle and demolished it in 1650. It would have been useful in 1667 when the Dutch invaded but the church survived and now boasts a 94 year old organist! Some industrial aspects of Queenborough were also covered, including the glue works, and the twinning of the town with Breda in Holland was an interesting development. There were stories about Hogarth, Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton and another one concerning Queen Elizabeth I, the Town Mayor, a pair of torn breeches and an "elephant" worth 13/4d. There is even an Elephant Park in the town belonging to this story!

It was time to meet the present Town Mayor, Margaret Brett, who took us along the High Street to her house, The Old Vicarage, where she described how unattractive green stucco on the front, had been painstakingly stripped away to reveal the original brickwork today. She pointed out some of the interesting old houses in the High Street, such as Evans Row built between 1791 and 1794. There were also some modern buildings so that the High Street appeared at its best when viewed as a whole from one end and then it resembles an 18th century seafaring town.

By now, it was lunch time and we walked through the creek area, along the medieval wharf with its boats, to partake of lunch either in the open air or at various pubs. The Flying Dutchman absorbed a large proportion of the party and suitably refreshed we were ready for the afternoon programme. By now the sun had really come out and long views over the West Swale were looking their best. We set off for Eastchurch, pausing there to view the memorial unveiled in 1955 which commemorates the pioneer aviators who flew from the airfield after about 1910. The Short Brothers, Rolls, Brabazon, McLean and others are named. Eastchurch retained its airfield through both world wars until the 1950's when a prison was built on the site.

Resuming our journey we crossed the Capel Fleet to the Isle of Harty and the early Norman church of St.Thomas the Apostle. There is no village and Sheppey's special atmosphere of peace, seclusion and remoteness was very apparent. There was a spectacular view across the East Swale stretching from the mouth of the Medway, past Faversham, Whitstable and Herne Bay to the twin towers of Reculver church. The churchwarden was to have spoken to us about the church and the Isle of Harty, but alas, he too did not appear. However, he had been kind enough to unlock the church door for us, so we settled down to another very interesting talk by Jonathan. This included a description of the beautiful stained glass windows installed in the church by Jim Weatherley who has twice spoken to the Society. There was also an old chest which had been stolen from the church and recovered because it appeared on TV and just happened to be seen by a salesman of the firm to which it had been sold!

Our last stop of the day was at Minster on its hill, where we were greeted at the Abbey Gatehouse by Barbara Greenstreet. The Gatehouse and the Abbey Church of the

Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Sexburga are all that remain of Minster Abbey, which was founded in the year 664 by Queen Sexburga of Kent. When the Abbey was re-established in 1130 after the depredations of the Vikings, the parish church was built adjoining the nuns' chapel and the Gatehouse may also date from this time. Barbara described some of the former inhabitants of the Gatehouse, including Sir Humphrey Gilbert who left his wife and children there in poverty while he went to discover Newfoundland but was unfortunately drowned on the way home. Eventually the Gatehouse was leased to the Sheppey Local History Society in 1979-81.

It has one floor devoted to the early history of Sheppey, including a model of Queenborough Castle and the second floor concerned with the island in wartime and collections of telephones and early radios. There is a flat roof which is 200 feet above sea level with another memorable view, this time from the Isle of Grain to Southend and Essex and over the whole Thames Estuary to the North Sea. Below us we could see a big wedding going on at the Abbey, which prevented us from going inside until the proceedings were over, another minor hitch! In due course the Verger, who was not expecting us, welcomed us inside and told us about the Abbey Church and its main monuments, including the stories of Sir Robert de Shurland and his horse (previously related by Anne Brunton at Member's evening) and of Sir Thomas Cheyne, a descendant of Baron de Shurland.

Then it was time for tea, originally to be provided by members of the local WI in the church hall. However, both WI and hall were fully occupied by the Wedding (which had its own horse-drawn coach). A very acceptable alternative was found at the White House Hotel on the Sheerness sea front, with yet another panoramic view of the Thames Estuary from the roof.

The trip home through Sheerness and Blue Town went past highlights such as the Dockyard Wall, the Musket Wall saved by Jonathan Fryer and the Garden Gnome Centre. So ended an exceptionally varied outing in excellent weather, for which many thanks are due to Jonathan Fryer, Barbara Greenstreet, John the driver and Frances & Gill.

As John has faithfully described, this outing took on a sense of adventure as arrangements made by us with Jonathan Fryer were coming apart on the day but due to his knowledge, he picked up the pieces as we progressed. In fact, the day turned out to be one of the best outings that the Society had experienced, due also in part to members being made aware of the unknown side to Sheppey.

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THE DRAPERS SHOP
BY MALCOLM YOUNGS

Many people will remember the large, privately run, drapers shops that were found in most towns until quite recently. These emporiums, as they were often known, grew up in the latter part of the last century taking over from the smaller, more specialised shops such as hatters, hosiers and silk mercers. The drapers dealt in soft furnishing of all kinds, 'heavy' goods, such as linen, cotton and woollens, haberdashery, and clothing, especially women's. These shops employed large numbers of staff and aimed to impress their customers with high class services, allied to competitive prices. Many catered for the upper and middle classes, and if they stocked goods for all classes, social etiquette usually meant that they did not meet on the premises. The gentry or

'carriage trade' usually shopped in the middle of the day, the middle classes in the morning and working classes in the evening when they had finished work.

One feature of the drapers shops that many will remember was the 'cash railway' in which money and receipts were transported from counters to cash desk in wooden carriers suspended on wire rails. A common practice in pricing was to reduce a round sum by a farthing (six shillings, eleven pence and three farthings was spoken as six and eleven three) and this led to shops giving small items of goods such as a packet of pins instead of a farthing change.

The apprentice system, combined with living-in, was a vital part of the drapery trade until the 1930's. Many young men were keen to become drapers' apprentices, in the hope that the training would enable them to open their own shop in due course. The apprentice (or his parents) paid a premium of between £20 and £100 before he was taken on and indentures were drawn up by solicitors. Some indentures were very brief, but others included detailed rules for the apprentice, such as the clothing he must wear and a requirement to attend church twice on Sundays.

In the larger shops many apprentices and assistants lived in, usually in an attic or basement, often in spartan conditions, looked after by a housekeeper and supplied with a very basic diet. There was a good deal of potatoes, bread and margarine and as Kipps says, 'He gives us beer, but the beer is watered'. There were strict house rules and dismissal soon came about if there were many breaches of the rules. Temperance was encouraged by most employers (many of whom were of non-conformist persuasions) and the house rules often forbade attendance at pubs and music halls. Many apprentices continued to live in after their apprenticeship was over, and their low wages, which took account of their board and lodging, meant they often found it difficult to marry and have home of their own. Living-in continued between the wars, although on a smaller scale, and had disappeared by about 1950.

Sidcup had several drapers shops, the largest being Dawson's which many people will remember on the site in the High Street now occupied by Somerfield's. It survived until the 1960's and in its heyday would certainly have merited being described as an emporium. In the 1891 census of Sidcup there were no less than 22 people listed as living-in at Dawson's. These comprised 8 female assistants, 7 male assistants, 2 female clerks and a cashier, a millineress and 3 domestic servants. All were unmarried and none was born in Sidcup or the near vicinity. One female assistant was Elizabeth Gadsby and one wonders whether it was she who opened her own shop in the High Street on the strength of what she learned at Dawson's.

Another shop that older residents may remember was Popplewell's, on the other side of the High Street, which dealt in ladies clothing and haberdashery. As in many similar shops, ladies underclothing was not put on display, but kept on the shelves in paper parcels.

Very few family drapers now remain and the word 'draper' has an old fashioned ring to it. They have been overtaken by changes in social and shopping habits, and tastes in clothes and home furnishings. The labour-intensive traditions of service could hardly survive today, but some of us may wonder whether a trip to Lakeside is really more enjoyable than a wander round the old Dawson's, with its pervading smell of linen and cotton, its polished mahogany counters and your change coming back to you on the railway.

(Reprinted, by permission of the author, from the programme of 'Half a Sixpence', played at St.John's Hall, Sidcup on 23rd to 26th October 1996 by the St.John's (Sidcup) Amateur Operatic Company. The musical is based on the famous novel

'Kipps' by Bromley born H.G.Wells, the third son of an unsuccessful shopkeeper and who was himself in his teens, a draper's apprentice).

The programme is a gem of a local history item, giving the names of the cast and the officers of the society, together with the various advertisements in connection with local businesses. It is precisely the type of memorabilia that a local history society requires for its archives and Alan Godfrey needs for our Millennium Project.

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AN EARLY SIDCUP RESIDENT
BY JOHN SEYMOUR

My grandfather, Ernest Frederick Seymour, came to live at 16, Crescent Road, Sidcup soon after marrying my grandmother, Nellie Fores, in June 1891. He spent the rest of his life in the same house but he was born at Rochford, Essex in 1857, the son of a master mariner, George Frederick Seymour and the family moved to North London in 1864. When Ernest and Nellie moved from there to Sidcup, George retired to Belle Grove, then a small village on Watling Street between Welling and Shooter's Hill, where he died in 1915.

Ernest was of medium height with a full beard, quite like King George V in appearance. Although he was about 70 years old then, we used to get on well together and had long conversations in his study in the 1930's and 40's, covering many subjects. Mrs Mari Alderman and her family live at No.16 now and on a recent visit I was delighted to find the study still much as I remembered it.

My grandfather was a tea merchant, a partner in the firm of Theodor and Rawlins of 71, Eastcheap. In 1913 he had travelled on company business by sea to Shanghai and then home from Vladivostock by Trans Siberian Railway. At that time cameras were quite small and used roll film so he carried a vest pocket Kodak (VPK) with him, obtaining good clear shots of his trip which were always interesting to see. He had also been a keen cyclist, belonging to the Athenaeum Bicycle Club in the 1880's when he lived in North London and he retained his 'penny-farthing' machine at home until he died. Apparently there were two methods of mounting such a machine, both highly dangerous!

Living as he did near the mainline stations of Euston, King's Cross and St.Pancras he was an early railway enthusiast, with a friend called Harold Bacon. Harold was an accomplished artist and had made many water-colour paintings of contemporary locomotives, which we discussed and which I still have. Other topics we covered were geometry, which he studied as a relaxation, and archaeology, particularly in Kent for example Kits Coty House near Aylesford. He also encouraged my hobby of building and flying model aeroplanes and influenced me towards taking up science later on.

With this background I thought I knew him quite well, until I found his obituary in the Kentish Times at Hall Place. This threw an unexpected light on his activities and it appears below.

"Kentish Times - Friday, June 25th, 1943. Obituary - Mr.Ernest F.Seymour.

By the death on Saturday of Mr.Ernest F.Seymour, at the age of 85, Sidcup has lost a resident who was universally respected and loved. He came here 51 years ago, shortly after his marriage, taking up residence at Eversley, Crescent Road, where he continued to live until his death.
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Various activities in Sidcup occupied his attention, in particular the Cottage Hospital, of which he was a valued member of the committee for a number of years, during two of which he acted as president of the hospital.
Mr.Seymour desired that Sidcup should have a hall which could be used for entertainment of all kinds, educational and religious purposes, and so became identified with the Public Hall (Sidcup) Ltd., of which he was for some years and at his death the chairman of the company. He was also interested in the Kent Archaeological Society and during the last Great War was an indefatigable collector for the War Savings campaign, and was one of the voluntary workers at Vickers.
Seeing Mr.Seymour striding along the streets of Sidcup one could hardly believe that he was an octogenarian, but he had always been active, and even when well over 70 he and his two old friends the late Mr.William Short and Mr.W.G.Speck (known to their friends as the three S's) used to take long country walks that others twenty years younger would not care to undertake.
The writer of this short appreciation had the pleasure of his friendship for 50 years, and during the whole of this period never knew him make an unkind remark or do a mean action. Such men are rare, and his passing on means a great loss to his numerous friends.
The funeral took place at St.John's, Sidcup on Wednesday, Canon C.E.Webb officiating".
The Cottage Hospital was built towards the end of the 19th century and stood on the same ground as the present Barnard Health Centre in Granville Road. I can clearly remember being a patient there as a child when my tonsils and adenoids were removed, so I was interested to read of my grandfather's connection as committee member and chairman.
The Public Hall was completed in 1881 and still stands near the top of Hatherley Road but now it is part of Beckett's Garage. I was intrigued to read that Ernest was chairman of the company as I have a memento of it in the form of a certificate for five shares of one pound each of Public Hall (Sidcup) Ltd. This was made out to my mother on 14th April 1934, with the total capital quoted as £6500 but I think that the shares have only an historical value today.
During the 1914-18 War there must have been a pressing need for maximum production at Vickers of Crayford and voluntary workers like Ernest would have given of their spare time to help maintain a steady flow of armaments of all kinds. Almost certainly he would have cycled to Crayford but on a bicycle with wheels of equal size.
The three S's all lived on the south side of Crescent Road and had moved there within a short time of each other during the 1890's. Mr.Short's son Philip and Ernest's son Arthur, my father, also became the best of friends. Mr.Short died in 1935, so I think it likely that the obituary was written by Mr.Speck. For the first 35 years of their time in Sidcup the three S's would have enjoyed country walks starting quite near Crescent Road. They need have gone no further than Sidcup Station or the High Street to find themselves close to the countryside.
Up to 1915 a frequent route would have taken Ernest across the fields to Belle Grove to see his father. There was open country to Bexley, Eltham and Chislehurst as well as places further afield like Crayford and Swanley. He enjoyed good health until shortly before he died in 1943 and never saw any need to buy a car as walking, cycling or taking the train met all his travel requirements.

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VISIT TO FROGMORE & SAVILL GARDENS - 12TH AUGUST 1997
BY GILL BROWN

As we left the coach at Frogmore it was about 11o'clock and Concorde flew right above our heads, having just left Heathrow. Someone wondered how Windsor could be one of the Queen's favourite homes when the Castle was right under the flight path.

Frogmore, which is a beautiful house in the grounds of Windsor Castle is only open to the public for a few days each year. During the week we went, it was only open to groups. Each group had a separate arrival time which meant we were the only people in the house.

The house was a favourite place of Queen Charlotte, wife King George the third, who spent a great deal of time there with her daughters. It was later lived in by the Duchess of Kent, the mother of Queen Victoria.

The curtains, furnishings and carpets are either original or have been reproduced to original patterns and colours. Some of the colours are rather bright but suit the location.

Throughout the house are beautiful white marble statues. Some just heads, but others, especially of the royal children are full length. One I thought particularly lovely was of a small baby lying on a cushion.

It was a very hot day and we were pleased to be able to wander in parts of the grounds for a while, to rest under the trees and by the lake.

Our next stop was the Savill Garden, situated on the edge of Windsor Great Park. It was not an afternoon for dashing about. We were able to stroll among the trees and admire the colourful herbaceous borders and rose gardens, taking several stops to sit and admire the view.

THE CRYSTAL PALACE
BY PHYLLIS PARKER

Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, was a very energetic and enterprising man. He was always interested in national affairs and with Henry Cole was responsible for the success of several exhibitions, on a small scale, in London. But they set their sights on something really big and in 1849 went to see the Paris Exhibition to get ideas. It was decided to make it an Arts and Science exhibition to be housed in a more or less permanent building in Hyde Park, in 1851. The idea was not popular with the people, especially those living nearby and many MP's objected but eventually the Government agreed. A committee was formed amongst whom was Prince Albert, Robert Stephenson (son of George), Robert Peel and William Gladstone. The design of it was put out to competition. There were 245 entries - but all were rejected!

Joseph Paxton was born at Woburn and in adult life became a gardener at Chatsworth, the home of the Duke of Devonshire. He was responsible for re-modelling the existing gardens and had built in 1836 the largest conservatory in the world, plus a glasshouse for growing lilies. These glasshouses were constructed on ribs of cast iron. On one occasion when visiting a foundry, he met Henry Cole, who invited him to submit a design for the Crystal Palace which was subsequently approved of by the committee. The foundations were laid in August, 1850. The glass was supplied by the firm of Chance and conveyed on barges from Birmingham to London . The committee wanted to avoid the uprooting of trees in the royal park so the Palace was built over them, but as work progressed it was found that the wild birds still inhabited the trees inside the glass which caused a problem as regards cleanliness. Several methods were used to get rid of them but in the end it was resolved by introducing sparrowhawks.

The Exhibition was opened on May 1st 1851 by Queen Victoria. There were 30,000 invited guests together with all the royal families of Europe. The centre piece was a glass fountain made of 4 tons of cut glass. Exhibits came from far and wide and were many and varied. The entrance fee for the first three days was £1 and was then reduced to one shilling. Four and a half million people attended before it closed on 15th October, 1851. A profit of £180,000 was made and this sum was matched by Parliament. Land at Brompton was bought with the money for the building of several museums which included the Victoria and Albert where a special section of the interior is named after Henry Cole.

Joseph Paxton then formed the Crystal Palace Foundation, buying land at Sydenham for the re-siting of the Palace, which began on 5th August 1852. In addition Brunel designed and had built the two water towers which fed the numerous fountains. Although many events were held there over the years it was never a financial success and the company was declared bankrupt in 1911. In 1913 it was bought by the Earl of Plymouth who gave it to the Nation. Many people remember the destruction by fire in 1936 - the fire was seen from many miles around. The towers were left standing until 1942 when they were removed to avoid them being used as a landmark by German bombing crews.

Today, the term, Crystal Palace, means to many of us the gigantic communication mast that we see on the horizon, the athletics track and the park containing fantastic stone dinosaurs and probably the ruins of the Palace comes last on the list.

Phyllis handed me this article for last year's newsletter but as I had more than enough material, held it over. In fact, I think it sits better in the 1997 newsletter as we are at the moment being bombarded with news of the proposed dome to be built in Greenwich for the millennium. She has reminded us that 150 years ago great British innovators, inventors and craftsman built this magnificent, almost cathedral-like building in glass! Imagine what was involved in removing the structure from Hyde Park to Sydenham! Let us stop running ourselves down and remember the work of men like Paxton and Brunel - Paxton's great edifices in glass and his gardening talents, and Brunel, one of the great construction engineers of all times.) *Editor*

A WORKING-GIRL'S MEMORIES 1940-1951
BY JUNE HUGHES (as recounted on members' evening)

I left school at the age of sixteen and a half in July 1940, when the second world war was nearly one year old. After a few day's holiday (to get over being a school girl) and with a complete lack of career's advice from any quarter, I felt I'd been thrown into the wide world and must find out how to get a job. As a so-called educated teenager - a word not known then - I would accept no helping hands from my parents, unlike some of my friends who had started work at the age of fourteen, when their mums or dads had taken them to work at their factory, building site or shop. All I could think of, was to write umpteen letters to umpteen addresses, giving details of my school record and offering my services! I listed names of banks, government departments, large companies - nothing too local, of course - it would be beneath my dignity to work in Sidcup or district! A potential high flyer, me, setting my sights on the big city - not "city lights", I hasten to add, because this was wartime and total blackout regulations were in force. I began to work my way through the list; with complete naiveté I sent no

stamped addressed envelopes which may have been why I didn't receive as many replies as letters sent. Amongst the replies I did get, were two which eventually shaped my working life between schooldays and motherhood. The first was a disappointing letter from the Bank of England, stating their policy of not appointing employees under the age of 17. Secondly, a letter from the Ministry of Defence offering me an interview at the Royal Ordnance factory at Woolwich, known to all as the Royal Arsenal. I had a successful interview, and was offered a post in the wages office, subject of course, to a favourable medical examination. I really knew nothing at all about "going to work". I was a complete novice, thrown in at the deep end of office work.

The munitions factory at the Royal Arsenal site was huge, and I am sure that in wartime, the employees numbered thousands. It follows then, that the wages office was vast in both area and number of clerks. My work was mainly applied mental arithmetic, calculating by hand, the total hours shown on the clock cards and multiplying that by the rates of pay for the job! Very few labour-saving or time-saving machines in offices then. I was earning 29/- per week.

The late summer and autumn of 1940 was the time of the Battle of Britain, and only long after then did I appreciate how fearful my parents were for my safety. They realised I was spending every day in one of the most certain target areas of the bombers. Indeed each time the air road siren sounded, on most days, sometimes more once, we had to leave our desks and take shelter in a very large basement. Knowing that bombs could be and were falling in the area, was not enough to put us off enjoying the drinks and snacks that were available in this basement retreat. I suppose it was a provision against the possibility of long term sheltering, but we did not think such sombre thoughts. One wonders how we ever got our office duties completed. I do recall working all day Saturday and even Sundays sometimes as overtime.

After the first few weeks of travelling by buses and trams to the centre of Woolwich from my home in Halfway Street, I began to make the journey on my bicycle. The office staff had been issued with tin hats to wear when we were in so-called danger zones. (I never knew whether the factory workers were given such protection) I made the most use of my helmet wearing it on my cycle rides to and from work! My route was through Woolwich Common, which housed hidden ant-aircraft guns. Many a time I would be riding home whilst an air-raid was in progress, and the guns were firing shells, with pieces of shrapnel pinging on my tin hat, indeed, I often dismounted to pick up these shell fragments to add to my young brother's collection.

I was quite happily settled in my job as a junior wages clerk, and have happy memories of my taste of office work, and of friends I made then, even though I lost track of them over the years. I recall an odd coincidence that the chief clerk in the wages office had been my mother's boss in her first job at the Kentish Times newspaper in Sidcup - what a small world.

In the summer of 1941 I heard again from the Bank of England. This time writing they were now recruiting more staff and invited me for an interview, if I was still interested. Was I interested? You bet! I took the interview and then another medical examination and was subsequently notified of my appointment. However, under wartime regulations, as a government employee (the Arsenal was part of the Ministry of Defence) I could not leave my job without permission. I was not fully aware of this until I handed in my notice and was told it would not be accepted. I had to say where and what my job would be and was told to await a decision. To this day I am fully convinced that the Bank of England had more clout than the Ministry of Defence, because they got me and the munitions factory had to let me go!

So, at the still tender age of 17, I began my second job in a vastly different establishment, at a salary of £102 per annum, paid monthly. This was a considerable improvement of my weekly wage of £1.9.0.

Right from the word go, I was overawed by the grandeur and tradition surrounding the Bank of England. Although I now had some experience of "life after school days", nothing had prepared me for the strict and to my mind old fashioned conduct expected from employees by the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street. I must have been among the earliest members of staff to be appointed from "outside". Prior to this time, one could only be appointed through sponsorship of an existing member of staff!

The building itself is huge, with seven storeys above the ground floor, and three below- the basement, sub-basement and the vaults. Quite overwhelming to realise that eventually one was expected to know the whereabouts of all departments in this vast establishment. Assistance in this respect was given to all new young ladies who performed menial tasks as their first job, and were known as "Runners". There must have been other arrangements made for male employees to familiarise themselves with their surroundings. They may have been given other dogsbody jobs, but they never became Runners. I realise how very sexist the atmosphere was, in keeping with good old British tradition of different attitudes to men and women. I am sure that in the present enlightened times, things must be quite different, but there was very little change apparent right up until I left after ten years.

Rules of dress were enforced at all times. Men, of course, wore black (sometimes with pin-stripe trousers) with collar and tie, though some senior grades gravitated to charcoal or even navy-blue or grey. Women were restricted to wearing only black, navy-blue or dark grey, and all were issued with a navy-blue overall which had to be worn at any time that your dress did not conform.

Runners were employed in the Post Department, which was huge in such a large establishment. Our job was to deliver all the incoming Post and internal paper-work, to every department or VIP and collect their outgoing documents for mailing or internal distribution. The onerous task of actually sorting the mountains of paperwork was performed by more senior staff than Runners. The whole building was divided into "Runs", and we had to take turns to learn them all, and perform them two to three times an hour. We always had to don an overall for this job, no matter what we were wearing - and also stockings! After two years of war, women were beginning to go barelegged but the Runners' supervisor kept a box of stockings, which we all had to rummage through and wear whenever we had to move around the building.

With its impressive entrance hall, and mosaic flooring, the ground floor is the most ornate part of the building and it housed the "Parlours". This was the name given to the inner sanctums where the Governor, Chief Cashier and other top executives had their offices and wherein was situated The Boardroom. It was sumptuous in every respect. The decor and furnishings were out of this world, elegant, expensive and beautiful; the carpets seemed ankle deep. To spend your days closeted in such an Aladdin's cave must surely be the ultimate in office environment. On what was known as the Parlour Run, one never knew if you would come face to face with some well known government personality or war-time leader, or persons famous in other spheres such as the armed services, or theatre or films. All of whom we would studiously ignore, though we spread the word like wildfire once we were back at base. On one occasion, on a tiny spirally staircase leading to a small mezzanine complex within the Parlour area, I recall having a brief encounter with Montague Norman, the then Governor. I had a coughing fit, a few words were exchanged and I had the distinct impression I was

being reprimanded. He was a very imposing figure - we were taught to think of him as "God". I believe to this day he is regarded as being the most colourful and impressive Governor in the Bank's history.

After a few months Runners were transferred to proper clerical duties and so began my 10 years of service in various departments of the Bank of England. From Stocks and Shares, Payment of Dividends with hand-written cheques, to Foreign Exchange Dealings, I added my small quota of clerical assistance. We were expected to work overtime at the drop of a hat. Many a time I'd be travelling on a train home from Cannon Street after 9pm., but so were many other people in those wartime days. We also worked alternate Saturday mornings when there was a daring departure from uniform with the men wearing sports jackets and flannels.

I recall how every year, coming up to November, people wished to swap their Saturday rota in order to be in town for the Lord Mayor's Show. We were allowed to go on the parapet over that part of the ground floor which is not built on, and as that was directly opposite the Mansion House we had an enviable view of all the proceedings.

The Bank had its own luncheon club, situated a couple of minutes walk away where we had a free lunch. The wartime increase in staff meant that the restaurant was overflowing and many of us were given vouchers to eat in the nearby "Slater's Restaurant" whom the Bank had contracted to supply this service. In my later years I used the official lunch club where we had waitress- service. I had my first taste of pigeon pie there. The exit we regularly used at lunch time was through the Bullion Yard. Quite often we nonchalantly strolled by piles of gold ingots and other valuables, hardly giving them or their guards a second glance. On a recent visit to the Bank of England's Museum, stepping inside the bank's premises for the first time in 45 years, I was intrigued to see a gold bar being passed around and to feel the great weight of it.

Food was never allowed to be consumed in the offices, and our coffee and teabreaks became amazing outings. We not only left the office but left the building also. My regular morning destination was Lyons in Cheapside for coffee and toast with honey or marmalade, and in the afternoon it was Fullers in Gresham Street for tea and fancy cakes. I believe our allocated break time was 20 minutes but this often stretched to half an hour or more. I suppose that for an hour or so mid morning and mid afternoon there must have been at least a third of the staff absent from their desks at any one time! One of the penalties of promotion was that the senior clerks were served tea or coffee in their small private offices, not having the freedom of the clerical masses. Junior young ladies had to take regular turns to make these refreshments in little improvised kitchen-like corners behind cupboards and serve them, wearing overalls, of course.

You will have realised that the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street made many lasting impressions on me. The final one was how quickly I was expected to hand in my notice when I became pregnant. No question of staying at work until your condition showed - my immediate superior said, "You won't be wearing maternity dresses, will you?" So ended my working life, not to be resumed until 17 years later when my children were growing up.

When June told us of her early work experience on members' evening, many of us having worked in the City of London, felt a sense of rapport. So many of us from the suburbs commuted to London, and still do, that this article is one for the archives concerning the daily working lives of people from our area. I myself worked in an insurance company in Threadneedle Street from 1953 and remember how proud I felt

when I was appointed to a position in the accounts department. We definitely had a relaxed atmosphere on a Saturday morning and as for coffee, I went as far afield as Leadenhall Market. This relaxed attitude gradually came to an end and then we went to the other extreme when the time and motion experts arrived. I was even timed picking up my pen. *Frances Oxley*

Pam and I holidayed in Suffolk this year and viewed in Bury St.Edmunds an exhibition of water colours by an artist, named Lilias August. Her thoughts on Suffolk contained within the exhibition pamphlet were so poignant that I thought I would share them with you.

"Like every county, Suffolk's identity - its essence - is found deep in its countryside and buildings. It is not only found in obvious historic sites - more often than not it lies unnoticed by the roadside. Just as a famous place overflows with history so also can a hedgerow, a tree or a pile of stones - everything has a story to tell! For me, many places and things that have a past, however, insignificant they may seem, have an inspiring presence. As nature reasserts herself over time, changes in appearance allow things to take on a new beauty and they become monuments to their heyday. The feeling of past activity and the sense that they were once important emphasise the inevitability of change - everything has its place and then it gives way to the next thing".

Frances Oxley.

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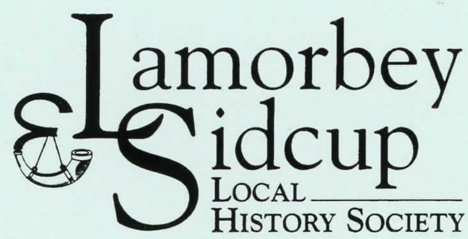

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