

Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 1999

Orlando Beale

LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Some of the Officers of the Society

Mr Harry Ingram, President &
Miss Frances Oxley, Secretary,
May 1999



A typical '99 Committee Meeting at Valliers Wood Road
with left to right:-

Mrs Mary Gilhooly, the then Minute Secretary,
Mr Eric Percival, Chairman, Mrs Bess Dzielski,
Publicity Officer, Peter Granger, Treasurer
and Gill Brown, Asst. Outings Secretary.

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All the articles (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

The Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society will have been in existence for fifty years in 2002. This year, however, Alma Road Adult Education Centre has been celebrating half a century of adult education in the Sidcup area, which all began at Lamorbey Park a few years after the Second World War. Many people remember with nostalgia the effect that the opening of Lamorbey Park had on their lives. Later in the Newsletter you will find thoughts on this time by our members Bess Dzielski and Betty Martyn. The then Principal, Harry Ingram, who still lives in the Coach House at Lamorbey and will soon will be 89 years of age, swept people off their feet with his ideas for both education and leisure pursuits. For many years residents went to Lamorbey for weekday classes on quite erudite subjects, but were also able to play croquet and archery, and on Saturdays, for instance, the Music Group met in the Library to listen to classical music. I believe the Sidcup Operatic Society also came out of this stable. Probably because of Lamorbey Park, the area became a village where people did know their neighbours. So it was in this atmosphere that our Society was born - the alternate evening to a fortnightly history class. I think the founding members would be pleased that the Society is still functioning and indeed flourishing.

The celebration which took place at Alma Road was organised by the Students Union with the Chairman, Thea Plank, playing a principal role. An invitation came to me as Secretary of our Society to join with many others who had been part of the Lamorbey/Alma Road classes over the years. Our MP, Sir Edward Heath, attended, as did the three Principal Education Officers: Harry Ingram from the inauguration, David Nicholle who followed on, and the present incumbent (i.e. for the Borough of Bexley) Richard Easterbrook. On his arrival Sir Edward unveiled a plaque situated in the foyer commemorating the half century. The plaque was carved by present students and it is worth viewing on your way in to Local History.

Mr. Ingram did not come forward and speak, but he and his son had prepared a piece which was read out. I am pleased to say that he specially sought me out to pass on a copy for the Society, as he is still our President. So rather than just placing it in the Archives, I thought it would be worthwhile if it is part of the Newsletter. Today's classes are focused on examination-related courses, and somehow the relaxed atmosphere of yesteryear seems to have vanished. We now meet at Alma Road and so no longer have the ambiance of history around us.

Lamorbey is now fully taken over by the Rose Bruford College of Drama. A new theatre in the round has been built - "The Rose" - where we can be part of the paying audience seeing the young people performing at the end of their academic year. It is a great tribute to the founder, Rose Bruford, that the College awards Degrees in Drama. And so - as must be expected - Sidcup is now a somewhat different place to that of 1948 when within living memory the High Street was called 'the village'.

During the 1998/99 year Phyllis Nash, a very long-time member of the Society, died after her concerns over her husband Philip's illness, and then her own. Her friend, Mary Boorman, has written a tribute to her. Several members have not joined for the current year due to illness, so we are sorry to say goodbye to dear Maybelle Hayward, Jean Brient, Margaret Gillies and Eileen Hall.

One of the highlights of the past year was our outing to the Hindu Temple and Chiswick House. On our arrival for lunch at the Café within Chiswick Park we were spotted by the Sunday Telegraph Restaurant Critic and so became part of the article he wrote on the café. We were seen as 'gentle superannuated pensioners' coming from an 'elfin kingdom'. Watch for a skit on this at the Christmas Social.

Frances Oxley - Hon. Editor & Secretary

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Adult Education in Bexley and Sidcup - the early days at Lamorbey Park
by Harry Ingram

Adult education should start at the top. In this case in a 200-year old stately home in its own grounds, with lake and nesting swans, only slightly bomb-damaged. It is to the great credit of the powers that were that, in the midst of post-war economic stringency, they got some of their priorities right: saw fit to hire a recently-retired army educationalist, and gave him the remit of establishing an adult education centre in these elegant surroundings for the enlightenment of the citizens of the borough. As the first Principal, or 'Warden'. it was my privilege to preside for nearly thirty years over the growth of this institution, starting unofficially at the beginning of 1947. Although it has since moved elsewhere, I have not!

A hard core of enthusiasts was rapidly formed, and many of these founder members continued to attend regularly for many years. Apart from the problems of getting the premises fit for use, which were considerable, the main question to resolve was the design of the curriculum that would attract and retain participants. The staples were language courses, classes on more or less arcane topics such as "The Brain" and "The philosophy of religion", and a current affairs discussion group. To these were rapidly added, the Sidcup Chess Club, societies for film, local history, English folk dancing, photography, amateur dramatics, oper(ett)a, choral singing, music, a symphony orchestra (patron, one Edward Heath), classes in solo singing, painting, silversmithing and bookbinding. A prominent member of the Operatic Society, who not only sang a fine baritone but also practised the ancient skill of toxophily and even made his own weapons, decided that the great lawn could be put to better use than as a drill square for mallards, and he founded the archery club. Cricket eventually and inevitably followed after the trees of the large fruit orchard had been progressively felled. The lawn tennis courts were a prized left-over from the House's glorious past. The Sidcup Art School and the Alma Road centre were in due course brought under Lamorbey's administration. Thus, apart from its opulent setting, "the Centre" developed on classic lines.

As the years passed, other institutions began to share the premises and/or camp in the park. Most notable of these was the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama (as it then was) created out of thin air by that eponymous and formidable lady. This establishment, which now has university status and has totally taken over as resident owner at Lamorbey Park after many years of "peaceful co-existence", provided the estate with a miniature theatre in a formerly derelict barn, and most recently a rather more formidable playhouse. My family were sometimes treated to a close-up view of famous associates of the College, such as John Masefield and Peggy Ashcroft, walking past the kitchen window as the washing-up was being done. Peter Ustinov once knocked at our front door - by mistake - in the middle of a Sunday lunch. The negative aspect of

such progress was the increasing pressure on parking space, and the Principal at last found himself living in a converted eighteenth century stable surrounded by a car park.

The life blood of an adult education centre is its members. Lamorbey was particularly fortunate to have access to a pool of people of every background and profession, and with a remarkable range of interests and enthusiasms. Without their persistent dedication to learning, and to the various activities which they often took the initiative to set up, with the Principal merely oiling a few wheels for them, the Lamorbey experience would not have happened. But they were also a fastidious lot, and the biggest headache of the year was the preparation, during the summer break, of the annual prospectus. Would a series of lectures on monasticism in twelfth century England fly? Was DIY car maintenance now sufficiently fashionable - and necessary? Was a class being progressively killed off by its subject matter, or rather by its lecturer? Where could one get hold of somebody to run a course that was in high demand but somewhat off the beaten track? Was TV/bingo/discos going to sound the death knell of the evening class? And would the local authority impose further budget reductions on the Centre's management in the coming year?

But this was merely the administrative side. Over the years, the Centre evolved as social habits, tastes and interests changed. (For example, while people still wish to brush up their French and Spanish for their holidays, the advent of cheap air travel has given rise to demands for less familiar tongues.) Fees increased by several multiples, but this did not seem to deter members. The old crowd got older and the new acquisitions fitted into the curricular life. However, the Centre was by then more than a place visited once or twice a week; for many it had become a lifetime habit. Undoubtedly the wide range of group activities provided a solid foundation for the extension of the mere evening class beyond a weekly chore into a strong focus for social and socialising activity. (In the latter case the Centre was quite successful in growing its own successor generations of members; the establishment of an afternoon Young Mothers' Group necessitated the opening of a creche).

I shall end on a personal note. This social focus did not exclude my own family; my late wife and my (then) young son gave both me and the Centre vital support - painting and shifting scenery, attending classes, singing in the choir, and even joining in an instrumental duet at one of the annual concerts of all musical arms given at the Kenwood of South London. Another essential feature of the Centre's persona was provided by the resident caretaker and his family. Although I ceased to be involved in the Centre's affairs on my retirement nearly a quarter of a century ago, and the Centre then relocated to its present home, the pull of the place on alumni and alumnae is such that I still regularly hear from and meet many members from those early days.

Some time spent at Lamorbey Park
by Bess Dzielski

I can't remember the exact date when I first visited the newly opened Adult Education Centre. Together with another library assistant I cycled down on pleasant summer evening - no thought of cars then - with a feeling of quite some enjoyment. We were going to see a film! Not just going to the pictures, you understand; there wouldn't have been anything unusual in that, the Regal. Sidcup and the Plaza, Blackfen were second homes to me. No, this was a FOREIGN FILM. We weren't used to anything like that in Sidcup then. It was CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL and this is what girls struggling through the professional exams of the Library

Association aspired to be. I'd like to be able to tell you that it made an enormous impact on us but - alas No. I can only remember it was in Italian with no subtitles, and my only memory of this intellectual evening was the hardness of the bentwood chairs on which we sat.

Some years later - married and with a small son - I helped found the Sidcup Young Mothers' Club which ran a creche while we attended afternoon courses. The chairs were more comfortable by this time and one particular series of talks has stayed with me ever since. Patrick Carpenter, an art historian, spoke each week on some period in the history of art, showing a slide of one particular painting which he regarded as representative of a particular school. Still in my mind is the Picasso by which he expounded Cubism. For at least ten minutes that afternoon, his explanation which included the example of two trains approaching each other, had me understanding Einstein's Theory of Relativity. I remember that the trains didn't collide, but don't ask me for any further comprehension now.

Enjoyable evenings were spent at the Current Affairs discussion group. We never came to any great conclusions but as Harry Ingram used to say, 'It was very good conversation'!. I spent some time on the House Committee, rarely opening my mouth in the presence of such impressive and self-assured members.

These are just a few of the reasons why the leisure aspects of Adult Education must be preserved; there's more to life than just passing exams and we should ensure that our political masters understand that.

Adult Education at Lamorbey Park

by Betty Martyn

Ralph and I joined Adult Education at Sidcup just after the war. I think it must have been about 1947 because he didn't come home from the Far East until 1946. He took English Literary History (under Richard Pedley) while I took singing. This was when the Lamorbey Singers was born under the baton of one, Lear Buck. While I was with the Singers we put on performances of 'Merrie England', 'The Tales of Hoffman', and 'Carmen', with professionals taking the leading parts. I can still warble parts of the choruses if any are played on the radio. Unfortunately Lear Buck died quite early on, but then his son took over. I left the Singers about 1949 when I started having our family. I also took Poetry Appreciation under Richard Pedley for a time. Richard Pedley went on to quite splendid things in the Education world.

The one thing I remember was what fun it all was. There was such a sense of liberation at the time, having just come through the war. I well remember some of the lovely parties we had at Lamorbey at Christmas, Easter, etc. I wish I could remember more - but it was a very long time ago.

Lamorbey House.

by Arthur Turnham

It was a glorious sunny afternoon in March of this year when I stood in the grounds of Lamorbey House and pondered on the history and of those who had been associated with the house over the past two and a half centuries. The occasion was my grand-daughter's wedding reception, being held at the one-time home of the Malcolm family of Portallach, Argyllshire. As many will know,

the family were great benefactors to the district of Lamorbey. In 1967 I met Lt. Col. G. I. Malcolm, the then head of the family, when he laid the foundation stone of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Blackfen, and whose father (Sir Ian Malcolm) had laid the foundation stone of the Church of the Holy Redeemer, Days Lane, in 1933. Because of this link with the past, as I looked round I felt that I had known the family and wondered if they too had ever held a wedding reception in Lamorbey House, their home. What an event that would have been in the style of the Victorians!

Being blessed with such a perfect day the grounds were an idyllic setting for guests to take photos and wander round, enjoying the emerging spring flowers, shrubs and blossoming trees with the peaceful lakeside background, with swans and water fowl gliding by. The majestic Lamorbey House with the surrounding parkland - The Glade - is a treasure in our midst. What a wonderful day to remember: a piece of future family history.

For many years the Lamorbey Local History Society met at Lamorbey House and it would be nice to know if anyone else can recall happy memories or events associated with the house, which however small are part of our historical past.

Tribute to PHYLLIS NASH

by Mary Boorman

It is with great sadness that I write this tribute to Phyllis Nash, who died peacefully on 11th April at her home in North Cray. Having spent many holidays and outings in the company of Phyllis and enjoyed a long friendship with her, I shall miss her cheerful and always interesting companionship. Phyllis had been a member of many societies, served on committees, organised outings and holidays with great enthusiasm for the benefit of members. She will be missed by many people, but leaves many happy memories.

Society Emblem

by Frances Oxley

The Society is now the proud possessor of a framed embroidery depicting the Society name and its emblem - a horn. We have to thank our member, Peggy Beasley, for her skillful embroidery which will be on show at meetings for many years to come. A photograph of her holding it will be placed on the back of the frame. Having had the embroidery framed, we decided to also buy a decent carrying case. The embroidery should give us a sense of "belonging", adding to the fact that a bust of our President, Harry Ingram, is also in the hall.

CASTLES AND BISHOPS

**Tour of Upnor Castle and the Historic City of Rochester
on Saturday, 17th April 1999**

by Marion Rawlings and Rosemary Bushell

Our day started damp and rather chilly, but we local historians were in cheerful mood and optimistic that the weather would improve - which it did. A short coach journey found us drawing up outside the Kings Arms Public House in the village of Upnor. We all managed to squeeze inside when coffee and biscuits were served. The landlord kindly suggested that

members of our party who so wished, could return after visiting the castle and shelter from the wet and the wind.

With some time to spare before the castle opened, we proceeded down the narrow High Street with its houses of typical Kentish Shiplack boarding to the River Medway, giving wide views across the estuary. However at this point the river is hidden from the view of visitors. The entrance gates were opened and we queued at the guardroom (18th century) to collect a personal radio guide so that we could proceed round the castle and associated buildings at our own pace. The commentary was very interesting and comprehensive, adding much to the enjoyment of the visit.

Upnor Castle is of Tudor origins and had close ties with the navy. It was built mainly between 1559 and 1567 (but with later additions and alterations) for the protection of Queen Elizabeth's warships anchored in the Medway, and its importance matched the growth of the dockyards at Chatham. The highlight of Upnor's history came in 1667 during the Second Dutch War, when it played an important part in preventing a Squadron of the Dutch fleet (which had already done considerable damage) from sailing further up the Medway. Even after it had served out its military usefulness the Castle retained its naval connection as a magazine supplying gunpowder and munitions to the men-of-war rising in the river, off the Nore, and sometimes in the Swale at Queensborough. It was a fascinating visit to a largely unknown castle with a commanding position on the Medway.

After our morning at Upnor Castle we boarded the coach again to take us to Rochester. We arrived in sunshine which was a welcome change after the rain and cold at Upnor. We met up with our guide at the Visitors' Centre and started our tour at Richard Watts "Poor Travellers House". This was given through the generosity of Richard Watts who died in 1579. His will made provision for the poor of Rochester. There were six bedrooms added to the back of the house where travellers each had a bed and a chair. The rooms were more than adequate and each traveller was given food and fourpence when they left. This house was later turned into an orphanage. The house was closed during the war years. From here we made a short visit to the Charles Dickens Museum. We saw the Swiss Chalet where Dickens wrote many of his books. The Chalet was a present from Charles Fletcher and was originally in the gardens at Gads Hill, but later transported to the museum gardens.

We walked up the High Street to the French Hospital, once used as a hospital but now private apartments for descendants of the Huguenots. We then moved on to Restoration House in Crow Lane. This was so named when the owner, Sir Francis Clarke, entertained Charles II on the eve of his restoration to the throne in 1660. (This house was used by Charles Dickens in his novel 'Great Expectations' as the home of Miss Havisham). Over many years work has been carried out on this house to restore it to its original beauty. Opposite is Kings House which was originally the Manor House, but is now the famous Public School, which has many other buildings in Rochester. We then progressed along Vine Walk, which used to be where the monks grew their vines for making wine. It is now a very pleasant park. Opposite the park is Vine House. This used to be a farmhouse many years ago, but is now a private house. It is a beautiful building and still has many features of the old farmhouse. We walked on, passing Minor Canon Row - sometime houses of the Minor Canons and Organist of the Cathedral and still standing in much splendour. Finally we arrived at the Castle, which stands opposite the

Cathedral. Unfortunately our time had come to an end, so we proceeded to the Refectory for our much-needed afternoon tea. Yet another enjoyable and successful day with the Society!

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What is 'funny' about Sidcup?

by Gill Brown

I offer the following -

Several years ago, when Bruce Forsyth was in charge of the 'Generation Game' one of the contestants said he came from Sidcup. 'Well somebody has to', was Bruce's reply.

In the film 'Cardboard Cavalier' Sid Field played a character called Sidcup Buttermeadow. The film was made in 1949 - and no, I didn't see it first time round, I was too young! It came on television about a year ago.

There is a quotation from a play by Harold Pinter, which is popular with calendar compilers. "If only I could get down to Sidcup. I've been waiting for the weather to break." This statement is from his play, 'The Caretaker' and concerns a character called Davies, who is a tramp and is sure that if he can get to Sidcup he can get his "papers" and confirm his identity and resume his place in society.

In an episode of 'Porridge' repeated quite recently, one of the characters named Heslop (played by the late Brian Glover) described an incident where his sister-in-law tried to seduce him - in the kitchen of her house in Sidcup!

Have you seen the car advert where a man is standing on a wet and windy moor? He's holding up a placard stating, "I'd rather be in Sidcup".

P.G. Wodehouse elevates Roderick Spode to the peerage and gives him the title 'Lord Sidcup' in his stories about Bertie Wooster.

I'm sure there must be many more examples where the name Sidcup is used to raise a smile. If you know of any, please let me know.

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An early Sidcup tennis player and motorist

by John Seymour

My maternal grandfather, Claud Douglas Beater, was born on 18th November 1873 in Blackheath, the younger son of Rev. Orlando Beater. In later life he would say, "If you read my birth certificate you will get a surprise", and I only realised what he meant many years later. He was christened Claude Herbert but the "Herbert" was soon changed, since his school record shows his name as Claude D. Beater and other records confirm that his given names were Claud(e) Douglas.

He attended the Blackheath Proprietary School from 1885 to 1890, and his record can still be read in the school annual reports held at Local Studies, Woodlands. In his last year he came top in Classics and won a prize, which contrasted with his performance in Mathematics where he was bottom of the class! However, as described below, he became a successful businessman in later life, so he must have been able to keep his accounts in order. His ability in Classics was perhaps reflected in his collection of books, ranging from Napoleon to Dean Inge to Conan Doyle and Kipling. He certainly instilled in me a love of the last two authors.

The background to his life is set out in his obituary in the Kentish Times of Friday, 15th June 1956.

Ex-County Tennis Player dies at 82.

“A widower since last year Mr. Beater had lived in Sidcup for more than 60 years and saw it grow from a quiet village to a bustling town. His first home in the district was Marlborough House School, Chislehurst Road, where his father, the late Rev. Orlando Beater, was headmaster from 1892 to 1904”.

Marlborough House School stood on the corner of Chislehurst and Upperton Roads and has been redeveloped into two blocks of flats: White Gates and Perry House which now stand on the site of the old school. The Beaters moved from Essex to Sidcup when Orlando bought the school and became Headmaster in 1892.

“At St. John’s in 1899 Mr. Beater was married to Miss Rosalie Marie Dewing Spurgeon by her brother, the Rev. E. B. Spurgin, then curate at the church, who was later appointed a Canon and was for 36 years Vicar of the Parish. Mr. and Mrs. Beater lived at Crossing Lodge, Station Road, Sidcup from 1899 to 1954 when they moved to their younger daughter’s home at 5 Priestlands Park Road. They celebrated their Golden Wedding in 1949.”

Claud and Rosalie had three daughters, two of whom survived and the younger, Dorothy Elton Beater, born in 1903, was my mother. Their house at 14 Station Road was pulled down when Sidcup House was built. No. 14 was effectively a time capsule as it had been furnished in a comfortable Victorian style in 1899 and then remained virtually unchanged until the Beaters left in 1954. The obituary carried on:

“For many years a keen lawn tennis player, Mr. Beater represented Kent in several matches between 1903 and 1909 and played on the old Wimbledon courts. From 1895 to 1904 he was captain of Sidcup Lawn Tennis Club. He captained Blackheath Club from 1899 to 1906. He gained numerous tennis trophies locally, as well as at famous tournaments in London and the Home Counties. One of the oldest non-playing members of Blackheath Rugby Football Club he was a regular spectator at the club’s matches on the Rectory Field, Blackheath, for well over half a century until last season.”

Claud was in his 30s when he played tennis for Kent, considerably older than today’s players which is perhaps indicative that the game was more leisurely in those days. As a memento of Claud’s tennis playing, I have one of his trophies which is a handsome aneroid barometer inscribed as follows: ‘CDB, 1st prize Gentlemen’s Double Open Handicap, South of England

Tournament, SEP 18th 1899'. It is likely that the tournament took place at the old Wimbledon Club, many years before the Centre and No. 1 courts were built in the 1920s. Claud was also very keen on Rugby football and unfortunately was injured in the mouth during a match at school. This prevented him continuing as a player but I well remember him driving over to the Rectory Field when he was in his early 80s to support Blackheath playing at home. The final extract reads:

“Mr. Beater served in the Sidcup company of the Special Constabulary in the 1914-18 war as transport officer of the motor-cycle section. He was among the first Sidcup residents to own a motorcycle. Always an enthusiastic motorist, he had an intimate knowledge of the villages and by-ways of Kent. In the course of business journeys through Kent alone, he claimed to have covered 500,000 miles. Only four days before he died he motored to Eynsford to see a business friend”.

I can recall a group photograph of the Special Constabulary hanging on the wall at no. 14 with Claud clearly standing with his motor cycle at the end of the front row. His interest in motoring was connected with his work, first as a tea merchant and then for many years as a coal merchant. He negotiated bulk deliveries of coal to firms such as the Black Eagle Brewery at Westerham and J & E Hall of Dartford. The coal came either through local merchants such as Wooldridges of Sidcup or direct from the Betteshanger Colliery in the Kent coal field. He must have got on well with his business acquaintances as among those who sent flowers to his funeral were Wooldridges and Cliffords (see below).

He had an ideal occupation as he always enjoyed driving through the countryside and he was lucky enough to have clear roads for much of the time. Up to 1919 he drove a motor cycle and then, as the cost of cars had decreased, he owned a series of open-top tourers, bought from Cliffords of Sidcup. The first was a model T Ford, followed by various Austin models, starting with an Austin 7. The last one, an Austin 10 tourer, he bought new in 1936 and it remained in the family until 1965. They all had folding canvass roofs, which rotted after a few years and let in the rain. Claud relied on my grandmother to let him know when the roof needed replacing because she would put up her umbrella inside the car!

Monet! Monet! Monet!

by Judith Hobbs

The day was Sunday, 18th April 1999. The alarm sounded at 4.30 a.m.. The occasion - the London Marathon? Yes - but not for us! No, my friend Pam and I were not running the Marathon but attending the Monet in the 20th Century Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts with time tickets for 6 a.m.

My gallant son Oliver dropped us off just outside Westminster Abbey at 5.50 a.m. We thanked him sleepily and walked in the cool London air to the Royal Academy. At 6.10 a.m. we went through the doors of the exhibition to behold the wondrous paintings Surely no one else would be as keen/mad as us? How wrong we were! Keen art lovers from all walks of life and spanning every age group were already there! Students, tourists, senior citizens and families with sleepy toddlers munching biscuits were gazing at the canvasses. We mingled with them.

Water lillies floating on tranquil waters depicted different moods by the use of vibrant ranges of colours. By standing back (crowds permitting) the images sharpened and cast their spell, giving each one of us an individual experience. Surely London had never looked so beautiful than seen through Monet's eyes and in the fog? Dreamy images of the River Thames and the Houses of Parliament in an amazing variety of colours created different light effects and moods. Majestic willow trees, magnificent Venice and the gardens at Giverny exploded from the canvasses, lifting our hearts and spirits. As Money grew older and experienced problems with his eyes he expressed himself by using bolder and darker ranges of colours on bigger canvasses.

By 8.30 a.m. there were so many people in the galleries we had difficulty in seeing anything at all. A quick look in the crowded shop and then out into the London morning. Over coffee and croissants we met an interesting man - a Marathon official whose job it was to hand out medals to valiant athletes as they crossed the finishing line. We ambled down into the Mall in time to cheer on young competitors in the mini-marathon. We made our way through St. James's Park to Charing Cross station where Millwall supporters sporting blue and white faces, hats, wigs and shirts thronged excitedly from incoming trains.

Back at my home in Sidcup we joined my family as they sat eating their breakfast and watching the Marathon on television. Yes, it had definitely been worth getting up at 4.30 a.m. to experience Monet and London on Marathon day!

**Europe's First Traditional Mandir
or Eat your heart out Christopher Wren!**

By Bess Dzielski

2,828 tonnes of Bulgarian limestone and 2,000 tonnes of Italian Carrara marble made up into 26,300 separate carved pieces by 1,500 craftsmen have been turned into 7 pinnacles, 6 domes, 193 pillars, 32 windows and 4 balconies. Incredible statistics, the kind usually associated with the United States. Was this the White House? No, the resulting white towering monument is a Hindu Mandir - the first such traditional temple in Europe which now dominates the mundane area of Neasden, hitherto connected by most of us with such everyday terms as the Hanger Lane Giratory System and the Chiswick Flyover; India come to a London suburb.

All the craftsmanship was carried out in India then shipped back to England, where over a thousand volunteers worked to assemble this enormous jigsaw. The Indian children saved 7 million drink cans for recycling, earning a penny for each, and the whole community worked to produce what has now become a pilgrimage centre. As many as 50,000 Hindus each weekend come from all over southern England and as far afield as Leicester, for the Mandir is central to Hindu worship, providing the bridge between God and Man.

Adjoining the Mandir is the Haveli - Courtyard House also richly carved from Burmese teak and English oak in an old Indian tradition and which acts as a community centre. 25,000 people can congregate here in the Prayer Hall - an enormous space unsupported by pillars and which can be adapted for multi-purpose activities for both young and old. This surprising settlement - the destination for the Society's day out on 5th June 1999 - has been described as the most remarkable London monument of the late twentieth century.

Welcomed first to the Prayer Hall we were introduced to the Temple and its place in Hindu culture by an enthusiastic guide. Entering the Temple itself, we placed shoes in small racks to enter the sacred area unshod and saw a video explaining Hinduism to prepare us for the ceremony of Sacred Murtis in which we were to take part.

Hinduism has been rooted in the subcontinent for over 8,500 years beginning in the valley of the Indus wherein through prayer and penance ancient seers gained the experience of God. It is claimed that India held the palm of civilisation and spread it to both East and West. Hindus believe there is one supreme God, the Creator, that he manifests himself on earth in various forms: that the soul reaps fruits, good or bad, according to its actions (karma) and is continually reborn to remain eventually eternal in the service of God. Its aspirant must seek grace from a spiritual master. Its spiritual authority is the Vedas and consecrated idols represent the presence of God which is worshipped. Hinduism codes permeate all aspects of daily life and its sacred books give guidance on all aspects, spiritual, moral and practical. It is non-violent, no meat is eaten nor alcohol drunk: all religions must be respected. Its central activities aim to help the individual and society to contribute towards World Peace.

The ceremony which we attended was that of the Sacred Murtis. The Murtis are marble idols, ceremonially infused with the divine spirit of God. Men were accorded the position at the front, women sat or stood at the back. Worshippers chanted and the doors of the alcoves opened to display a number of exotic, elaborately dressed and turbaned, highly made-up figures - the Murtis, the spiritual successors of the Lord who are enshrined in this Mandir. We could not, of course, understand the mantras being recited but could only watch as candles were moved in rhythm before them. This ceremony lasted perhaps a quarter of an hour, ending with a tray bearing a candle presented for the collection of offerings. We then toured a well-mounted exhibition showing the history and various aspects of Hinduism before leaving this incredible and imposing place.

The theory of Hinduism is as impressive in its virtue as the tenets of Christianity. The faith which created this magnificent edifice may yet influence some who approach it initially as a tourist attraction to consider also the spiritual.

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We were 'exposed' in the Sunday press!
Visit to Chiswick House on afternoon of 5th June 1999
following the morning visit to the Mandir
by Frances Oxley

We then travelled on to Chiswick Park where we were booked to have lunch in the Burlington Café in the grounds and then to tour Chiswick House. Unbeknown to us we were watched with great amusement by a restaurant critic as we marched towards the café! The first I knew of this was when I opened the 'Sunday Telegraph' Magazine of 1st August and looked at the week's critique on restaurant dining. The headline screamed at me "The Burlington Café in the grounds of Chiswick House is a delightful oddity, writes Matthew Norman". "A lino-floored hut, it serves probably the best park food in Britain". My attention was captured as I knew the café and its owner. The article was written in a delightful vein, commencing with the description of a possibly childless couple who were hogging one of the tables outside the café to the chagrin of many parents with children desperately wanting to sit down. However a group of people that

came in force did the trick! That was us! Mr. Norman said that on emerging from the café with friends, coping with coffee gâteau and apple cake, a bizarre sight met their eyes. From the thickets of the adjoining woodland, four elderly ladies were materialising as if by magic. Six more followed, marching with unspeaking determination towards the café. Two old men appeared next, followed in turn by another ten ladies. On and on they came, the “silent superannuated army”, until 50 pensioners were gathered by the entrance. He inquired of the owner whether they were from the “Elfin Kingdom in the woods”? No, Bexleyheath he was told. “Its the Bexley Society - they come once a year”. He ends the article by saying that for some mysterious reason, “these gentle civilised folk” achieved what others had not. The young couple had moved on.

I rang Eileen, the owner of the café, on the following Monday, whom he suggested was a “Barbara Windsor lookalike”. She was very pleased with the headline, but wasn't sure she wished to be seen as someone else. She confirmed that mine was the party referred to and not another one from over the way at Bexleyheath. I have written to the critic in the following vein, and at the time of writing, have not received a reply. Perhaps I never shall!

“Dear Mr. Norman,

The article on the Burlington Café made such good reading as I was one of those from the “Elfin Kingdom in the woods”. In fact, as leader, I was one of the first four to emerge from the woods. We had been visiting the Hindu Temple at Neasden and I think we were anticipating the lunch we had ordered from ‘Eileen’. After lunch we were due to tour Chiswick House. In 1998 I led the Bexley Civic Society on this tour, taking in the Burlington Café, and similarly in 1999 (on the day you were around too) led Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society over the same route. That is why Eileen said ‘they come every year’! It is amazing how other people see us. What a lovely expression, ‘gentle civilised folk’. Some of the members are in their 80s and very sprightly, but some are in their 40s. The article will be part of our archives. I can see a marvellous sketch coming up for our Christmas social. Signed - Miss Frances Oxley - Hon. Secretary or Chief Elf!”

Having consumed home-made salmon & broccoli flan, Burlington rarebit, etc. etc. some of us proceeded to Hogarth's House and the rest to Chiswick House. That's another story..... We finally left Chiswick in the pouring rain after we eventually got Ida Buckle to sit down, as she wanted to know the result of the Derby from the driver's radio. We do have our characters in the Society!

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Visit to home of Royal Regiment of Artillery, Woolwich

by Janet Woods

The Regiment (“The Gunners” as they refer to themselves) was formed in Woolwich in 1716 - on in part of what is now the Woolwich Arsenal site and moved to the barracks in 1776. The impact of the building is well known with its elegant 1080 ft. frontage flanked by the enormous space of its parade ground. The Regiment is an integral part of the locality and a source of pride. To mark this, the Regiment was given the Freedom of the former Borough of Woolwich, and this has been extended to it now having the Freedom of the Borough of Greenwich. It is fitting that the gun from which the metal for making the VC medal was taken now stands in the parade ground - the Regiment has 62 VCs.

Frances organised a visit following a suggestion from Mr. Stockdale, a member of Bexley Civic Society and involved with the Royal Artillery Association. We were shown round the building by Lt. Col. Paddy Steele, a retired Officer who could describe the life of the Regiment from many different viewpoints, having been promoted through the ranks. One hesitates to stereotype, but it has to be said that Col. Steele is an Ulsterman. He is a brilliant raconteur and has the good humour, wit, and lack of pomposity associated with the Irish. Under any circumstances it would have been an enjoyable visit, but he made the day.

Yet it was a serious visit. We came home aware of the Regiment's history; understanding the ethos of the Regimental system; and sympathising with the sense of frustration the services must feel at the continual cutbacks which have undermined their traditional structures - particularly those of the Army. We saw the Regiment's impressive collection of medals, showing how initially there were commanders issuing individual medals for bravery - but only to Officers. The first medal issued to "Other Ranks" was at the Battle of Waterloo, and retrospectively Queen Victoria issued a medal for every soldier who had served in the Peninsular War. Later medals detail the Regiments continuing service to its country.

We saw the silver plate used regularly at Regimental Dinners, and as we stood in the Mess it was easy to imagine the Regimental Band playing at one end, and the silver, the uniformed men and women, the wine glasses, the glittering chandeliers - all this scene being reflected back and forth in the mirrors around the walls. Society members were refreshed in less exotic surroundings, having a drink at the NAAFI bar followed by a good Army meal in the self-service canteen.

After lunch we visited the Rotunda Museum. It was interesting to go back to the role of the Royal Artillery in the Napoleonic Wars and see the cannon, the munitions, and the description of the tactics used. For people who had lived in this area during the last war, it was interesting to see the display of anti-aircraft protection. Our local connection with the Regiment extends to Erith and Crayford with the development of the machine gun by Maxim at Erith and Vickers at Crayford. Crayford was built up during the First World War because of the number of workers needed by Vickers. As Col. Steele was keen to emphasise, the Regiment's history reflects British history. Let us hope that the Regiment never moves from its home in Woolwich.

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See overleaf

Some members waiting entrance to
Upnor Castle, 17th April, 1999.



SOCIETY PROJECT - 2000

NB: HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR PIECE FOR THE MILLENNIUM PROJECT AND PASSED IT TO THE COLLATOR? IF NOT, THERE IS STILL TIME FOR YOU TO PRODUCE SOMETHING.

Rallying cry from the Society Secretary - Frances Oxley

Try and think of a typical 24 hours in your life in Sidcup. There must be an object or an episode that you would like to describe for posterity. Please think about it!

The completed project will be given to the Local Studies Officer from Hall Place at one of our meetings in 2000. I know many members have participated and the Society thanks them for their contributions. For the rest of you - get cracking!

Photos!

Trisla to Phyllis Wash

Iamorbey
& **S**idcup
LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY