

ANGELA EVERETT
16

Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2000



*Marriage of John & Olive Mercer
at St. John's Sidcup on 4th March 2000*

*Peggy Beasley with her
beautiful embroidery of the
Society Logo*



Frances standing on The Meridian Line



SOCIETY VISIT TO THE DOME APRIL 2000

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All the articles have been written by members of the Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society and the Newsletter produced by Frances Oxley, Janet Woods and Martin Watts. Meetings are held at the Alma Road Adult Education Centre, Sidcup, during term time. Miss Frances Oxley, Hon. Secretary, may be contacted at 48, Beverley Avenue, Sidcup, Kent. DA15 8HE

The Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society was founded in 1952

EDITORIAL

In common with many others, during this very special year the Society has visited the Dome and - unlike the media - found it a good experience. We went in April, which we decided would allow a good settling down period after all the New Year hullabaloo. Such was the interest shown by the members that four of our ladies said they could have done with another hour at least to take in all that was on offer. It is conveniently forgotten that the area surrounding the Dome was a derelict industrial site that has now blossomed into an exhibition, shopping and residential area that has been skillfully landscaped. So let's dismiss the carping but remember the tremendous good that has come from this Greenwich Millennium project. Following our visit we once again had the privilege of listening to Frances Ward, Local Studies Officer from Greenwich, relating the history of the site, which in its day provided employment for local folk as the Dome has over the last few years. Eric and I from time to time participate in Malcolm Barr Hamilton's Tower Hamlets walks and recently were on his Blackwall walk. We finished at the Virginia Wharf (from where many set sail for America) which is directly opposite the Dome. We could hear floating across the Thames the music of the Arena performance which reminded us of the Society's visit. Further on in the Newsletter two of our members have articles on the visit.

It is quite a year for Society visits as on September 19th many of us will visit Buckingham Palace when we shall see many of the portraits of Kings & Queens that are mentioned so often in our lectures. I particularly wished us to visit this year as so much more is open to the public - the room that is used for investitures for instance. You might remember that a few years ago whilst a ceremony was being held, part of the ceiling fell down - do hope that we will not be privy to the same experience!

The highlight for 60 members - in three groups of 20 - was the perambulation of Westminster Abbey, guided and entertained by the Purcell Club. Two members from one group evening said that they had been in the Abbey during the day when it was absolutely tourist ridden but how the monastic atmosphere was captured in the quietness of the evening when we all felt in our own way part of the history of this great 'Royal Peculiar' and the music over the years that has graced so many services.

Your Chairman and Secretary will also remember the year 2000 with great affection - come November a certain event will take place at the Manor House, Sidcup, when vows will be exchanged between us and little Miss Oxley will become Mrs. Percival. So there you are - we will become part of the Society's folklore. It seems the year for these sort of happenings. Marion Rawlings became Mrs. Maurice Hearn and John Mercer married his Olive. Eric announced these two events to the Society and I think he is secretly waiting to announce our change of status. By the time we commence our Local History evenings, I don't think many people will need the announcement.

Frances Oxley - Hon. Secretary &
Newsletter Editor

10th September 2000.

My Dome Experience
by Freda Elam

The Dome It was a question of taking part. Four Musketeers ventured forth (Mary/Daphne/Barbara/Freda) - one with scooter, who did extremely well. Beauty of it was, it went anywhere and everywhere. We managed to visit the following exhibitions: Journey, Money, Body, Mind and the Millennium Jewels by De Beers (to see the Millennium Star - 203 carat - and the eleven exceptionally rare blue diamonds). The Dome TV screens for information on various attractions & the queuing times were useful. We also found the staff very helpful and full of fun.

Millennium Show Lively story - clever - vibrant - colourful. We were approached after the show by "Arnaud" (French of course), public relations man from Disneyland, for our views of the Dome. What a charmer!!!

Our concern at the end of our visit - what will be the future of the Dome? Maybe a good training centre for our young athletes *with accommodation*. Who knows? Thank you Frances and Gill. We had a very happy and interesting day.

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The Dome Visit
by Alan Godfrey

I was quick to put my name down for the Society's visit to the Dome - the experience of the Millennium. I was curious as to what the Dome had to offer. I had read so much about it in the press; saw on television the construction at the site and listened to the cynics.

Our coach dropped us off at the turnstiles and I was aware that I could not see a single car - quite a novelty! The Dome itself was huge, and I liked the visual impact of the shape and supporting struts. The site beside the Thames is flat and open to the elements but the vast Dome welcomed us into its depths warmly. The centre of the Dome is an arena with seating for thousands. Around this core areas of zones with various themes. We were directed around in a clockwise direction.

The first zone was that of work. Most of the reading material was of short sentences on large screens - just as well owing to the gently moving flow of people going through the zone. One horrible fact was that the average job of the future (which is here now) will only last five years before total retraining is required. I somehow spent 32 years in my work and got a pension - how lucky I was!

I then wandered into the Learning Zone where I saw a short film about learning and the seeds of knowledge. The film screen then rolled up and the audience was invited to walk forward into a mirror lined room full of simple computers which tested our numeracy and other skills. I then found myself in the Mind Zone, which I failed to understand. The best bit was a giant wax model of a boy squatting down and, I presume, thinking. I went into a second room which was full of loudspeakers putting out various pitches of sound.

The Faith Zone next door was set out like the coils of a snail's shell. As I wandered round past photographs or videos with speech and images, I found it all rather blurred as one loudspeaker's sound track overlapped the next a few feet away. This was not a total Christian exhibition. Other faiths were shown but I did not see anything for people like me without any religious faith but who regard themselves as Humanists.

I had a timed ticket for the Body Zone which meant joining a moving queue of people, which made its way into the Body inside an artery. A huge upside down pear-shaped object hanging from the ceiling was a human heart which pulsated away nicely until a loud scream put up the heart rate alarmingly. The queue snaked past the ribs, spine and a huge eye. In a cave-like area were a selection of brains on stalks, one wearing a fez. This turned out to be Tommy Cooper. It was a pleasure to stand there and listen to some of his jokes. The queue was then shepherded along by an usher who said, "Please move into the womb". I thought she must have a lisp, but no, we were in the womb with a sperm darting about on the ceiling to the sounds of much joy and jubilation.

The arena show was interesting and was good family entertainment. Simple love story. Music and sound effects. Young people flying about on trapeze at a great height. I was pleased to see that they all wore safety harnesses. The stage crew were a joy to watch as they performed a well rehearsed programme to get the gear into the right place at the right time.

I went into the Talk Zone to look at the potential for communication sponsored by BT. The reading material consisted of short quotations - lots of loudspeakers and sound bites - sounds and messages merging with each other into a jangling wallpaper that finally made me want to get out of the zone as quickly as possible.

Outside the weather was fine. The River Thames (liquid history) looked superb at high water. I had a cup of coffee in a pavilion and looked around at the customers. By now it was late afternoon and they looked tired. I went out to look at the old gas works jetty which is now a wild life reserve and has been planted with riverside plants, bushes and a pond. Nearby the Greenwich Meridian drew me to stone slabs with poems on them. Nearby was a round storied ventilation shaft divided into bays showing how far away other places are in the world from Greenwich and I heard recordings of the languages spoken in those parts. A "water recycling" unit showed how rain water falling on the Dome roof was being recycled for use in the toilets.

The staff at the Dome were superb - very helpful and positive - and very funny in their roles as ushers in the Skyscape Cinema where I saw a Black Adder view of history. I enjoyed the film but wondered whether foreigners would enjoy the British sense of humour.

My overall impression of the Dome was that of sound bites, computer screens and noise. Congratulations to everyone for putting the Dome experience together. I'm sure they have done their best. The building will be a good public arena for sport or exhibitions in years to come. If I had the choice, I would rather go to Downe House and walk in the footsteps of Darwin than get my senses scrambled at the Dome.

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Millennium Visit to Lullingstone Roman Villa by Brian Woods

As residents of a London Borough we have all been aware of the general hullabaloo surrounding the Millennium Dome and the very secular Millennium celebrations. However, as residents of North West Kent, with Lullingstone Roman Villa on our doorstep, the Millennium is an obvious time to think about the arrival of Christianity in Roman Britain, since Lullingstone is one of the most important Christian sites in Britain.

We have evidence at Lullingstone Villa of organised Christian rituals in the 4th century AD - at a site which virtually disappeared for two Millennia before being excavated in 1949 by Lt. Col. G. W. Meates. We know that there was possibly a timber Villa in the 1st century AD when Christianity was one of many Roman religions, with the Christians often suffering great persecutions. The Villa was remodelled and enlarged in approximately 350 AD when Christianity had successfully displaced the other religions of the Roman Empire.

Today's visitor to Lullingstone, viewing the majestic mosaic floor in the apsed dining room, is aware that the Villa provided a beautiful haven and that the mosaic shows the owner was a classical scholar by its illustrations drawn from Ovid and Virgil. However, to appreciate the full significance of the site at Lullingstone it is also necessary to make the short journey to the Weston Romano-British Gallery of the British Museum, which contains a magnificent permanent display of archaeological material from Roman Britain - the Christian material being marked as a Millennium exhibition. The exhibition contains high class silver tableware discovered in East Anglia bearing Christian inscriptions, and although none has been found at Lullingstone, we can assume that the owner of Lullingstone was a Christian as adjacent to the dining room was a Christian Chapel containing a series of magnificent wall paintings. One painting depicts a series of figures at prayer in the distinctive early Christian pose with raised hands. Another magnificent panel contains the chi-rho monogram containing the first two Greek letters of Christ's name, which was the standard symbol of the early Christians. These paintings from Lullingstone which

can be seen in the British Museum provide convincing evidence of Christian ritual in the fourth century.

The archaeological evidence in the British and other Museums shows that Christianity was spread widely throughout this island among all classes and that by the middle of the 4th century - 250 years before St. Augustine came to Kent - Britain was a Christian island. Even though Lullingstone Villa was abandoned by 420, and by the 6th century Saxon pagan invaders had occupied most of the island, yet when St. Augustine arrived in Kent to convert the English, he was able to preach at Canterbury in a building which had been created by the Christians of Roman Britain many centuries before.

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Into the 21st Century by Eric Percival

To me it seems strange when I hear the 1960s referred to as being in the last century. It has been popular for the last few months to compare our present time with one hundred years ago.

Today our country is not involved in a major war - problems in Iraq and Bosnia are the equivalent of sending a gunboat, though now its a few Harrier jets. In 1900 names like the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, Ladysmith and most of all Mafeking were on every one's lips as casualty lists appeared daily in the daily press. When Mafeking was relieved in May, a new verb was invented 'to mafek', meaning to celebrate with wild abandon. Bexley borough played an important role in the war, being the manufacturing centre for the Maxim gun. On a more humane side of our locality, Miss Bean of Bexleyheath set up a local war fund and raised £100, a large sum in 1900. In New Eltham, Dr. Rice announced that he would treat free of charge, the families of soldiers at the front living within a five mile radius. An early United Nations-type force was rapidly formed consisting of troops from such diverse countries as Britain, Russia, Austria, Hungary, France, Germany and the US to combat the Boxer revolution in China. Now, UN forces are in many parts of the world - Africa, the Middle East, Cyprus, and, of course, Bosnia.

Today we have motor cars which will convey us reliably (some in air-conditioned comfort) anywhere in the country. At the beginning of the twentieth century cars were still very rare and were hand built. One body builder even went to the extreme to please his customer and provided a whip holder near to the driver, presumably to beat reluctant horse power! One motor magazine announced that it "was not cruel to drive a car quickly up hill". The Lamorbey cart van and wheel works were busy, and John C. Beadle would sell you every description of vehicle. However, the horse bus and carriage were still the main means of transport, bringing their own form of pollution!

Today we have aircraft capable of carrying us to Australia in forty eight hours. One hundred years ago the first Zeppelin flew and the Wright brothers were yet to make their first flight. It was in 1900 that the Prince of Wales (soon to be Edward VII) opened the all-electric underground - Central London Railway. There was one fare for any distance and it soon became known as the 'twopenny tube'. Our local transport was more basic. A newspaper headline "Cyclists discreditable conduct" described an accident in which a man in Days Lane (Halfway Street village) was knocked down, resulting in a dislocated shoulder. The cyclist did not stop.

The Lamorbey National School held a concert in Lamorbey Church in aid of school funds, opening with the audience singing the National Anthem. Ronald Marshall was much applauded for his rendition of 'Let me like a Soldier Die'. A Miss Oliver after singing 'The Absent Minded Beggar', conducted a tambourine collection and raised £2.0s.11d.

Other newspaper items from Sidcup included an advertisement for the position of a cook-general with an annual salary of £18. You could buy Mitcham Green cigarettes for 5d for five. Bicycles - the main means of transport for many people - would cost several months' wages: the range of Juno cycles being advertised from £8 to £14.

Probably the main event of 1900 which we recall today was on 4th August, when a baby girl was born who was destined to become the Queen Mother and is still with us in the year 2000. Final news item: a giant wheel began to give rides at Earls Court, so what's new about the London Eye.

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How Things Have Changed

by Anne Brunton

with acknowledgement to Beverley Nunns

Some of you will know we had to move out of our house for about five months while repairs were carried out. It was an experience I did not enjoy and hope never to repeat. In all the sorting out that went on, I came across in my local history papers a fascinating short history of Sidcup, described as an article entitled 'Appendix'. I think it may be the appendix to a book called "Seven Gardens for Catherine", and it is attributed to Beverley Nunns (Chairman of the Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society). It is too long to reproduce in full, so I have condensed it, using Beverley Nunns' words for the most part, but adding a few comments where it seemed appropriate.

Sidcup is about twelve miles south east of Central London. The subsoil is an indifferent mixture of poor clays and gravels and is supported extensively by oak, birch, elm, hawthorn and blackberry. There has been a settlement since 1254 in "old" Sidcup, which lay partly in Chislehurst and partly in Footscray. "Old" Sidcup consisted of nothing more than an inn, a smithy

and a few cottages and houses scattered loosely near the top of present day Sidcup Hill. From about 1700 onwards a number of large houses, often with landscaped parklands and home farms, were built in the area for "City" men (Directors of the Bank of England or the East India Company, etc.) St. John's church, a chapel of ease to Chislehurst parish was opened in 1844.

There had been talk of a railway line to Sidcup along the Dartford Loop line since 1837, so when it finally arrived in 1866 there was no great surprise. City merchants, bankers and professional men, who could not commute to the City and West End, moved from places like Clapham, Streatham, etc. to more rural Sidcup. In 1909 the railway was electrified and some people moved back to South London.

A Brighton solicitor named Robert Upperton inherited some land in Sidcup, west of The Green and the new Elm Road (cut in 1869) and let out building plots to a Mr. D. J. Tuhey who planned and built a rectangular grid of roads - Upperton and Carlton Roads and The Park (alias Park Road). Three main groups of houses were built between 1880 and 1882: semi-detached in Carlton Road and larger, detached houses also in Carlton Road and The Park. The estate was never completed.

Westburton was a large double fronted house on the corner of The Park and Carlton Road and was occupied in 1883 or 4, by Miss Willoughby and within two years she was succeeded by two sisters, the Misses Edith and Gertrude Pearce. They were both governesses, one at the Vicarage and the other at the Manor House. The Vicar encouraged them to start a regular school, so a galvanised iron schoolroom was built in the garden and Westburton Ladies College was opened in 1886, catering for one hundred pupils including some boarders, the galvanised hut was still there in 1975, when it was demolished and the land was sold for housing. One wonders what today's education and welfare officers would have made of this situation: school in a tin hut!

In the 1870s other parts of Sidcup were being developed on a field by field basis. Many old trees were left standing and most new roads had trees planted in their verges. Sidcup was considered then to be a shopping mecca where there were quality shops to be found. Those were the days!

During the First World War a few of the big houses were used as hostels for workers from the Vickers factory at Crayford and Belgian refugees were also housed in the locality. Sidcup was a close knit community with good shops, flourishing local societies, choral groups and tennis parties. (In the twenties most houses could accommodate a tennis court in the back garden). Everybody who was anybody went to the City by train every day (and in a silk topper) and the girls were educated locally. All this was set in a farm ringed environment of tree-lined lanes with stiles and public footpaths.

Sidcup House (on the present day site of what was until recently FADS) was demolished in 1928. Froggnal House was the living quarters of Queen Mary's Hospital staff. Now it is up-market assisted living accommodation. Sidcup Place, having been a private house, a school and Council Offices, is now a restaurant. Manor House - a private house, a maternity home, a boys' school,

Council Offices, and the Borough Registry Office, now known as the Register Office (or to give it its full title "The Office of the Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages"). Hadlow House stood where the Sidcup Library is now, and Lamorbey Park has had a similar chequered history before it became the Adult Education Centre and the Rose Bruford College. Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society started there in a small room which held about 30 people, but just grew and grew - look at us now.

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Fire at Windsor Castle!

Peter Granger's summary of the lecture to the Society

A graphic account of the disastrous fire which swept through Windsor Castle on 20th November 1992 was given by Mr. Marshall Smith, who, for twenty two years had been the Officer in Charge of the Windsor Castle Fire Brigade. He was involved, together with the many fire crews and their appliances called to the scene, in endeavouring to contain the blaze and in making critical decisions to minimise the spread of the fire and to limit the damage - not least from over one million tons of water poured into the building.

His talk was illustrated by dramatic photographs showing the progress of the fire as it engulfed the buildings and destroyed St. George's Hall, the Chapel and many other rooms. Throughout the nine and a half hours which it took to bring the blaze under control, the safety of the firemen and protection from collapsing roofs was a priority and the careful monitoring of their entry to and exit from the building and use of appropriate equipment prevented any fatalities from occurring.

Appeals for food to sustain the firemen during their long spells of duty resulted in supplies arriving from local traders, together with 'burgers from McDonalds and a W.I. tea wagon. Windsor Scouts provided a large inflatable tent in which exhausted men could rest and change out of their wet clothing.

Numerous paintings, tapestries and many priceless objects were saved by the efforts of the fire crews and other helpers. Thousands of dustbins were later filled with the remains of roof timbers, plaster work, panelling, chandeliers and fabrics for use as samples for the subsequent manufacture of replicas and the massive reconstruction project.

Mr. Marshall Smith continued his talk with descriptions of the refurbishment works carried out by men and women experts in many crafts, which he illustrated with photographs showing that the restoration had been carried out so faithfully that it is now hardly possible to believe that the disaster on that November day ever occurred.

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Visit to Walmer Castle and St. Margaret's Bay on Saturday, 27th May 2000

by Olive Mercer

At the end of a cold rainy week we set off in our coach for a day full of interest, and which remained dry apart from a sharp shower while we were on our way. We stopped for coffee at Elham Valley Vineyard, where we saw the vines and sampled the wine, and admired pots (several of us bought these) made by the special needs students who meet there, and who also work in the café.

On through the beautiful valley to Walmer Castle. As the party was large for this tiny castle, we were issued with coloured badges identifying us as oranges or lemons, and carefully following our meticulously planned visit, we lunched, toured the Castle, and admired the gardens in the order indicated by our orange or lemon status. In the castle - where the Duke of Wellington died - we saw his room and those occupied by William Pitt and other Lords Warden of the Cinque Ports, including the current Warden, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, who still stays there every year.

We were driven next to St. Margaret's Bay, to the Museum and the Pines Garden. A cream tea and a walk down to the beach to see (from the outside only) the house on the beach where Noel Coward lived. There was even a minibus to ferry us back up the steep hill to the coach at the end of a bracing and energetic day. Warm thanks to Frances and Gill for a faultlessly organised day were followed by a presentation to Frances of a Wand of Office (with bells on) which we will hope to follow in the future.

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Shadow Chasers - 11th August 1999

by Dave & Janette Cunliffe

We first became seriously interested in the eclipse back in 1997. It was the first total eclipse whose shadow would cross the British mainland since 1927, which by strange coincidence Dave's father remembers being taken to observe as a child on the outskirts of Liverpool.

Having investigated on the internet we found that one of the places on the line of totality was Plymouth. This seemed a good location for a short break, so we set about trying to secure accommodation. The most amusing thing was that the reception staff, when we made the booking, asked if there was something special occurring that week as they had had a lot of enquiries which they found unusual for a weekday so far in advance!

During the first half of 1999 we avidly read anything we came across about the eclipse and familiarised ourselves with what would happen, precise timings and the safest methods to observe

and photograph the event. This caused much amusement for our neighbours when we were taking test film from the garden with numerous filters and telephoto lenses.

On 10th August we travelled down to Plymouth. Taking heed of advance warnings of severe traffic we set off at 5 a.m., but thankfully encountered no congestion on the roads. Having checked in at our accommodation on the outskirts of the City, we went for a walk to explore our surroundings and find a suitable vantage point to view the eclipse.

When we woke the next morning we caught a brief glimpse of the sun but general cloud cover did not look too promising. With fingers crossed, it was hoped that the dismal weather forecast would prove to be wrong on this occasion. An hour or so before first contact (the moment when the moon first starts to obscure the sun's disc), we went to our chosen vantage point and set up our considerable camera equipment. We had a special solar filter as well as masses of notes about exposure times and hoped to get some good photos of the various eclipse stages. Everything had been seriously rehearsed many times before.

We were up on a hillside above the main road into Plymouth. The time for first contact arrived and there was still no sign of the sun. Things were not looking good for the 35 mm photos we had hoped for. As a result we quickly changed our plans and decided to make a video diary instead. The video camera was pointed in the direction from which the shadow would be approaching. We also gave a running commentary of what was happening and kept the video tape running throughout. On our rucksack was a small thermometer, so we decided to record the temperature at regular intervals throughout the eclipse. These readings were later fed into a survey being conducted by the Science Museum via their web site.

As totality drew near, the sky started to go dark and street lamps began to come on automatically. In the distance a firework was set off on Plymouth Hoe as totality arrived there. The shadow sped towards us at a phenomenal rate and as it did so the crickets in the undergrowth began to sing, as had been heard at dusk the previous evening. Despite all the rehearsals in our mind, nothing could have prepared us for this. It was fantastic! The cars on the main road below had all stopped, the temperature had dropped by several degrees and everything was completely black. The shadow passed over us all too quickly and after about two minutes, daylight began to return. The crickets became quiet again and the temperature returned to normal.

The whole experience of totality lasted only a few minutes and we hadn't seen the sun, but it certainly was an awe inspiring event and we were pleased to have joined the ever growing ranks of "Shadow Chasers". One thing is for sure, unfortunately we won't be around for the next totality in Britain which won't take place until 2090!

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A Volunteer at Queen Mary's Hospital

by Mary Biggs

When I moved to Sidcup in 1982 I decided to look for some voluntary work, and before long I discovered that the Women's Royal Voluntary Service might be able to arrange this. The WRVS was first formed in 1938 to help local authorities in their preparation for civilian care in the event of war. It was directed in peace time to help people who needed assistance, in particular in helping people to remain in their own homes. When I first inquired in 1983, volunteers were needed in the Maternity Department at Queen Mary's Hospital, and I was told that most of the patients there were not ill, as they were expecting a happy event, and it was very pleasant to work there. We acted mainly as receptionists, and sometimes used to check the weight of the expectant mothers. After a few years the Department was computerised, and we were told that the services of volunteers were not needed, but we were asked to attend a meeting where we were thanked for our help. We were each presented with a white china mug, which was decorated with a design of blue flowers. I thought it was most attractive.

This was not the end of my career at Queen Mary's as help was needed in the Eye Department in the main building. This was a specialist department and patients were referred to us from Bexley and the surrounding areas. When I first joined we used to work in a rather cramped area on the ground floor, but after a time we moved to a newly furnished department on the second floor. Sir Edward Heath came to open it officially. Unfortunately I was not on duty that day, but I believe the people who were found it a very pleasant departure from the usual routine.

In this new department there was an outpatients clinic and an emergency clinic. Very young children used to attend the outpatients clinic, and there was a playroom with plenty of toys for them, but not all children took advantage of this. Some youngsters used to make it clear that they wanted to go home, but others took it all in their stride, and used to walk up and down on a tour of inspection, and seemed to be wondering what was going on.

I was mainly concerned with the emergency department. People of all ages ranging from school children to people in their nineties used to attend. Some of the very elderly patients were very alert, but they were usually accompanied by a younger relative or friend. Some patients looked a rather sorry sight with bandaged or inflamed eyes.

Volunteers used to act as runners between different departments and we quite often went to the main filing department to fetch patients' files. There must have been hundreds if not thousands of files in this department. After a time, I succeeded in working out their system, but I always found that the permanent staff were very helpful if I had problems. Sometimes I used to go to the other departments and I came to know my way around the hospital quite well. The volunteers mostly did quite simple jobs, but I did not mind this as of course I had often heard that many hospitals were underfunded and understaffed and there were long waiting lists for would-be patients, and I liked to help if I could.

Recently the WRVS has issued a quarterly magazine, and I have learned from this that the organisation has been restructured and the first conference in recent years was held last March. Two hundred employees met in Manchester to hear what is hoped will be achieved over the coming year. This includes targets for community, hospital and emergency services, and fundraising. The WRVS also hope to attract more volunteers, and to produce a handbook for all project managers on best practice volunteer management. Volunteers who are able to may be allowed to take on more responsibility in days to come.

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Loring Hall

by Louise Beaver

The Past. Situated in Water Lane, just off the busy North Cray Road, Loring Hall is not widely known. It is not easily visible and access to its interior has been limited because of the nature of its occupation. It was built in 1760 to replace a farmhouse, some of which was incorporated into the new building. The new house was then known as North Cray Cottage.

Its most famous resident, Viscount Castlereagh, 2nd Marquis of Londonderry, leased it in 1810. He enlarged the property, laid out the gardens and used the farmland for raising Merino sheep, a hobby which gave him much pleasure. The place was a treasured country retreat where he could seek respite from the pressure of his office as Foreign Secretary. He held the post for ten years covering the end of the Napoleonic wars and the turmoil in Europe which followed. When he became mentally ill in 1822, it was to North Cray Cottage that he was taken and there took his own life.

When the leasehold of the property was sold in 1829 as North Cray Villa, the auctioneer's description details an elegant house with lands, gardens, hot houses, graperies, situated "in the immediate vicinity of the celebrated trout stream called The Cray". It continued as a private residence with further enlargements taking place and was re-named Woollett Hall. (There was a family named Walett living thereabout in 1527).

Over the next hundred years, there was a series of occupants. Frederick Friend and his family (and domestic staff) lived there fore more than thirty years in the last half of the nineteenth century, followed by Ronald Keep before and during the First World War, and John Coppen and Edward Jeffreys. In the 1930s the house was taken on by Mr. Leslie Korth, MNCA who used it as what he later described as a Nature Cure Home. It was called the Woollett Hall Health Hydro.

In 1938 Woollett Hall was put on the market because it was not large enough for the numbers wishing to avail themselves of the benefits of the Hydro. It was bought in 1939 by Goldsmiths College for use as a hall of residence for students. However, World War II intervened and in

1940 Kent County Council rented the house to accommodate elderly evacuees from "public assistance institutions". There was some bomb damage to both the house and gardens.

At the end of the war and now named Loring Hall after Mr. William Loring, the first Warden of Goldsmiths College, it finally did become a student hostel and remained so until 1982. For the following sixteen years until 1998 it was a nursing home. Since the nursing home closed, Loring Hall has been empty and deteriorating.

The present: Loring Hall was bought in September 1999 by Sargent Cancer Care for Children for use as a residential centre for young people (13 - 21 years of age) who have or have had cancer. The aim of the project is to help them regain their independence and boost their confidence by short-term breaks (two or five or seven days) offering social, educational and leisure activities.

The state of the building was grim ranging from unstable foundations because of water in the basement up to a variety of roofing materials, including plastic sheeting. These conditions as well as the special requirements necessary to accommodate youngsters who may be severely physically handicapped has made a complete renovation and refurbishment essential. All work is being carried out with close co-operation and monitoring by Bexley Planning Department and English Heritage. (The building is grade II listed). The exterior will not be altered apart from the possible installation of an access for wheelchair users at the rear by hiving off part of the kitchen.

The interior is undergoing major change. Having stabilised the foundations, work then moved to the installation of new services throughout the house. In addition to the gas, water and electricity required for basic needs, there is a complex system of alarms - sound, light and vibration - to cover all aspects of health, safety and security. Water temperature is controlled to prevent scalding; one of the lifts can be operated by battery power in case of fire or electricity cuts; all central heating radiators are enclosed; windows are being covered with invisible bomb blast proof film in case of accidental falls. (The window sills are low and the old glass is particularly fragile and film avoids the need to put up bars).

Despite the drastic work required to provide bedrooms, bathrooms and communal areas, as much as possible of the original house is being maintained and its grace and style copied faithfully. A flimsy partition dividing one of the bedrooms has been removed to return it to its former proportions. The main staircase and the wood panelling in the large drawing room will be renovated. But there are some innovations: the lifts, of course, and a very modern circular staircase inside the turret to provide a fire escape at a point in the building where no escape was possible before. A video recording has been made during all the work and this will be placed in the Planning Department and Local Studies Centre. There is one other change. The house has a new name: Its signboard will read: MALCOLM SARGENT HOUSE (Loring Hall).

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Bill Gallafent & Eric Percival discussing the merits of the scooter



Frances Oxley having a go!

Anne & Kent noted
at of winter

John & Olive Mercers wedding

Lamorbeey
& Sidcup
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