

Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2001



Frances & Eric Percival
Wedding Day - 4th November 2000



Post Wedding Reception - 9. December, 2001

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All the articles have been written (except the verse) by Members of Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society. Meetings of the Society take place at Alma Road Adult Education Centre, Alma Road, Sidcup during term time. Mrs Frances Percival, Secretary, may be contacted at 14, Valliers Wood Road, Sidcup.Kent. DA15 8BG

EDITORIAL - FRANCES PERCIVAL

Great preparations are in hand for us to celebrate the Society's fiftieth anniversary. Janet Woods and I are the sub-committee organising the dinner to be held in June 2002 at the Hop Farm at Paddock Wood. It is certain that we shall order two coaches to take us from Sidcup to the Hop Farm. In other words, well over a hundred members and friends. Prior to the reception and dinner, members will be able to visit the hop museum. Final arrangements are now being made for us to have a tour of Lamorbey House on Saturday, May 18th, 2002. This is very pleasing as members that were not with us when we met at Lamorbey Park will be able to see where the Society was housed for 44 years, firstly the billiard room, until we moved to the largest room there as membership was increasing - somewhere in the region of 50-60 members. Membership has increased dramatically since our arrival at Alma Road. Due to fire regulations we have a limit of 120 members which we now seem to hover around quite happily.

Happiness was the name of the game last Autumn as Eric & I announced we were to be married. You were all so very pleased for us and we were well aware of exciting things being spoken of when we were out of earshot. Eventually, we were handed the commissioned water colour of Lamorbey Park and John Lewis vouchers (still to be redeemed as we want to use them sensibly) for which we felt so grateful. For the Chairman & Secretary of the Society to be given such a personal gift as a depiction of Lamorbey was so 'right'. On the actual wedding day of November 4th, what a lovely sight met our eyes as we departed the Manor House Register Office - lots of 'local history faces' beaming at us, waiting to wish us well. So, a big 'thank you' from us, to all of you, as you were last Autumn, our extended family.

Two members have been together much longer than us, namely Millie and Les Salmon who this year celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Millie was proud to show us their cards including one from Her Majesty, The Queen.

We were also proud to announce, that our member Linda Whitby, at a Council meeting received from Cllr. Wilkinson, Mayor of Bexley, the Civic Recognition of Voluntary Service Award. This was well deserved.

Then on the 22nd July 2001, one of the most photographed spots in Sidcup (or indeed the Borough), Five Arches Bridge succumbed to old age when one of the weirs at the base of the arches collapsed. At the time of writing the bridge is closed with much scaffolding around it. This happening, has obviously presented the opportunity for a good overhaul of the bridge. Let us hope it will soon have the scaffolding removed and delight the eye again.

OBITUARIES

During February, 2001 we experienced the loss of one of our longest serving members, **Jack Saunders**. He served the society well during his many years as Treasurer and as the wine buyer for the Christmas socials. His knowledge and love of history was wide, particularly archaeology. He could always be relied on to give a good, thoughtful vote of thanks and his quiet presence will be greatly missed.

It was also my sad duty during the past year to announce the death of **Brian Streets**. Brian had been a loyal member of the Society although in recent times he had not enjoyed the best of health. Our thoughts are with Phyllis in her sad loss.

Eric Percival - Chairman

THE FIRST TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

AS RECORDED BY BEVERLEY NUNNS IN 1979

The Society meets at Lamorbey Park Adult Education Centre, a building originally dating from the earlier 1500's: after centuries of private occupation and alterations Lamorbey was bought by the Kent Education Committee in the autumn of 1946 and quickly opened in January 1947 for new-style Adult Education. The fourth prospectus (that for 1949/50) included a new fortnightly class on Wednesday evenings titled Local History, with 'local' meaning 'Kentish': as time went on, the interests of regular members sharpened towards the history of the more immediate area so, two sessions later, permission was given for class members to form a study group, meeting in the same room on the alternate Wednesday evenings but on a 'do-it-yourself basis', i.e. use of the Centre's facilities but without official funds for speakers etc.

Wednesday, 1st October 1952 thus saw the Local History Study Group launched with a talk on 'The Geology of Sidcup'; early meetings attracted about a dozen members, speakers being the members themselves or such acquaintances as were prepared to come and speak for (usually) no financial reward. Since then, numbers and funds have increased and events - which are by no means confined to lectures - currently attract an attendance of thirty or more; but the Society (which changed its name from 'Group' in 1956) continues to meet alternately with an 'official' class covering some aspect of History or Topography - indeed, it is a model example of a society that grew out of a class.

Study Visits ('Local History through the feet') were soon established as a strong feature: it should be explained that in the early 1950's the car explosion and the third age of Sidcup's expansion were only just beginning and it was really possible to examine surviving local topographical features on a Saturday afternoon or a summer evening but, apart from that, friendly relationships were established with local institutions, of which a number have been visited. At the same time, old and new national institutions within a convenient journey of Sidcup have also been visited.

After 25 years or more the Society thus still offers a happy blend of talks, events and visits, all reflecting members personal, local and national interest, and this is epitomised in the list of items that members loaned for a Jubilee exhibition.

(It is pleasant to think that now after fifty years the above underlined sentence still holds good with the aims of the founding fathers to the fore - Editor)

NOTES ON SOME PAST SOCIETY OUTINGS (1)

Frances Percival

May 1975 - Mr Nunns arranged an all day tour to Edenbridge & Limpsfield at the cost of £1.65 which did not include refreshments.

April 1976 - Mr Nunns arranged an all day visit to Canterbury - cost of £2.50 - which included coach fare, exhibition and tea. Left Sidcup from the corner of Old Farm Avenue, outside RACS (now the tile shop) with member Mr. Edwin Hayward, (Canterbury born and bred) conducting a tour of the City.

May 1976 - Mr Nunns arranged a visit to Bayham Abbey and a trip on the re-opened Tenterden Railway at a cost of £3. This included coach fare, train ticket, tea and tips. The £3 being collected on the coach!

October 1976 As a follow-up from a visit to the Red House a visit was made to the William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow and to Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge at

Chingford. On the way a stop was made at Victoria Park for a guided visit. Tea was taken at Dartford.

March 1977 - Billed as a Do-It- Yourself journey to Leighton House and Pollocks Toy Museum. Train to Charing Cross where, 'Be prepared to wait ages for a No.9 bus to Holland Park. Later catch the 73 bus to Goodge St. for the Toy Museum and afterwards have a cup of tea - opposite north end of Heals - allow 25p'

March 1979 - Mr & Mrs Nash now Outing Organisers. By car for tour of Eltham Palace

May 1980 - Visit to Chichester Roman Palace and Weald & Downland Museum. Cost £6 including tea.

May 1983 - Watermill Museum at Haxted and Penshurst. £7.20 including entrance fee and cream tea. (This is the first tour I remember being on. Frances P!)

May 1984 - Lavenham & Ickworth when the rains came.

May 1985 - Lewes and Rudyard Kipling's house (Batemans at Burwash).

May 1986 - Christ's Hospital - Horsham

May 1986 - Colchester & St.Osyth.

(I believe that the main outing took place in May each year, coinciding with Cup Final Day, when people poured into Wembley)

Then in 1989 Norma Huntley together with myself took over the organisation of the Society outings - the first being the tour of the EuroTunnel Exhibition at Folkestone and an 'on your own' afternoon at Canterbury.

MORE SOCIETY NOTES FROM THE PAST (2)

We have a record in October, 1964 of John Mercer paying a subscription of 1/6d. Due to his career, he has not had continuous membership since that date but did return again some years later - had this break not occurred he would have been our longest serving member.

The 1970 Summer Programme gives the President as Mr.G.B.G.Bull MA PhD with enquiries to Mr F.Drake, Secretary or Mr.B.N.Nunns. Annual Subscription 2/6d.

Decimal Currency then arrived and the 1972 subscription was 15p (3/-)

For many years the Society alternated Wednesday evenings with a lecture course. For 1972, the course was 'Villages of South London'.

In the 1974 Programme Mr Harry Ingram is shown as the Vice-President. He was the first Principal of Lamorbey Park Adult Education Centre and still lives in the Coach House at Lamorbey. We are proud that for some years he has been our President.

The following members are due for long service and loyalty awards:-

26 years - Mary Boorman & Joyce Ilett

24 years - Les & Millie Salmon

22 years - Val Allen & Irene Pope

21 years - Anne Brunton, Angela Everett and Frances Percival (Oxley)

SIDCUP AT THE YEAR 2000

The Society's Millennium Project - Bess Dzielski

This was the inspiration of Alan Godfrey who, several years before the great event, realised the importance of providing a record of ourselves as we went into the third millennium. He proposed that members of the Society should record the life and times of Sidcup as a snapshot of history - everyday people doing everyday things in an everyday suburb. Members rose to the challenge magnificently and at the Annual

General Meeting on Wednesday, 8th November 2000 Stuart Bligh, Local Studies Manager of the London Borough of Bexley received the project to be deposited in Bexley Local Studies Archives. Four heavy loose-leaf volumes contain photographs, pamphlets, news cuttings, and typescripts of a variety of subjects all compiled and annotated by members.

It might seem invidious to select one item in particular, but pride of place must go to Anne Brunton, midwife of Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, who recorded the turning of the year from 1999 to 2000 in the Maternity Department of the hospital, photographing the new life born to happy families together with details of the staff and department. But there's hardly an aspect of life that hasn't been covered - details of pubs, shops, restaurants record what we buy and we pay for it. There are local theatres and entertainments and a variety of publications and pamphlets. Publicity from the Co-op is well represented including information on genetic foods, while the guide to Bluewater shows a distinctly up-market trend. John Mercer's contribution on street furniture reminds us what a clutter we have become used to, Peter Granger on eating out in Sidcup provides some mouth watering choices - he must have had a great time checking them all out, as must have John Butler with this catalogue of public houses in North Cray, Sidcup and Bexley!

Ebdon's Tours show just how far you can go, what it costs to be a member and the numerous pick-up points and Jeanette Matkins produced an amazing list of plants to be seen in the local parks, together with their Latin names! Brownies, Guides and Rainbows appear; many people discuss their hobbies. Graffiti, modern manners, the weather, television viewing, theatres and cinemas and travel and ticket prices are all here. Pictures of glamorous bridal outfits come cheek by jowl with prams and buggies. The pamphlet box of miscellaneous publications makes fascinating reading, especially the first Daily Mail of 2000.

Even by now some of the prices are out of date - what will browsers in Local Studies in fifty years time think of it all? They will surely be as amused and interested in this as we are looking at fashions and studies of the Thirties and Forties.

THE FLAGPOLE (or four flagpoles and a wedding)

By Bill Belsham & Betty Martyn - nee Belsham

Bill Belsham says :- This is a short history of a flagpole - the Flagpole at St.John's Church, Sidcup.

During the year 1937 it was decided by the local TOC-H to donate a flagpole to St.John's. Our apologies if our recollections of names and exact dates are slightly vague - but it was some time ago. We believe that the gift was organised by Captain Downes for whom our father had recently built the Crusader Hall in Grassington Road.

The tabernacle and a pole- the pole still with its bark- appeared in our garden and we recollect the hours of planning and preparation taken by our father prior to giving it many coats of best lead paint. For the tabernacle, in which the pole is mounted, a hole was dug one evening and the tabernacle installed. On the Friday evening, 23rd April 1937, about six young men of Toc-H, plus father, raised the pole. Not a simple task, for the pole, as you can imagine, was quite heavy. Some of the helpers were pulling on ropes from the nearby church porch roof and some pushing from below. There was great satisfaction when the top bolt slid into place and the pole secured. To our knowledge, the first flagpole at St.John's!

The first use of the pole was to be the next day, Saturday, 24th April when the Vicar, Canon Spurgin was to assist Bishop Harmer in conducting the marriage of his daughter,

Mary, to Frank Turnbull. It was a big occasion in what was then 'our village' - the Bishop, no less!. Mary was a lovely lady who nursed at the Cottage Hospital and was much loved and respected in the Parish. Thinking back, in all probability the whole gift and installation had been organised with this date in mind.

Saturday morning arrived, the Verger, Mr Murless, appeared with the brand new flag. Consternation! 'Where's the Halyard' - It had been stolen overnight. The rope was of the best waxed woven flax!!. The Vicar was called from the Vicarage in Granville Road where, no doubt, great preparations were in progress. Father was called. There was mutual respect between Vicar and Father, Father having spent much time on the Vicar's roofs and the Vicar having married Father twice and christened his six children. Conversation would have been brief. Canon Spurgin to Father, 'Belsham - Fix it'. Father to Canon Spurgin 'Yes Sir'.

No time to lower and re-raise the pole so it had to be climbed. The Vicar volunteered his son, Elton, who appeared clad in white shirt, shorts and plimsolls. He manfully climbed the short ladder for the first ten feet before tackling the pole where he was persuaded, very reluctantly to abandon the attempt owing to his obvious lack of 'head for heights'. Knowing this, it had been courageous of him, to have attempted the venture in the first place.

What now? Time was running out - BUT - help was at hand. Syd appeared - Syd Phillips in overalls and boots - Father's long-standing workmate. He wanted to know what all the fuss was about. He sized up the situation, seized the halyard and was up the pole like a rat up a drainpipe. There were cheers all round and the Wedding could then commence.

Betty Martyn now takes up the story:-

My main recollection of the first flagpole was of the excitement associated with Mary Spurgin's wedding. I can't now remember whether I was in the Brownies or the Guides. I think it must have been the Guides because Miss Bunting was our Brown Owl in the Brownies and I can well remember my friend Betty Kirby and I being suspended from the Brownies for saying 'twit-twit' in a rather cheeky way. We had to go to her house in Selborne Road to apologise before we were re-admitted to the Brownies, so it must have been Mary Spurgin who was the Guide Captain at the time of her marriage. However, there was great excitement amongst the Brownies or Guides, or maybe it was both, because we had been chosen to form the Guard of Honour. I don't remember much about the wedding itself, but one of my main memories is the fact that we were all given a small bar of Cadbury's chocolate in recognition of our services. I still have my Brownie Badge but sadly cannot find the Guide one.

Of course, I still remember the drama associated with the rethreading of the rope. I can still see Syd Phillips in his working overalls shinning up the pole to the excited cheers of the small crowd of onlookers.

Thinking about the day again, I'm pretty sure that our Father would have been one of the band of bellringers on that day.

Bill now takes up the story again:-

The pole already described stood until the late 1950's during which time, Father would have taken a 'fatherly' interest in the pole and had periodically repainted it. Then it became obvious that time had run out for both it and the tabernacle. Having now seemed to have adopted us as its family, we offered a new pole to the Vicar, now Canon Webb. Mr. Henderson, who we believe was one of the then Churchwardens, was employed at Vickers at Crayford, arranged for a new steel tabernacle to be made. A pole was obtained from Hyde and Clements, ladder makers at Orpington.

Father having by now passed on, I inherited the pole and after another twenty years, a similar pole, number three, replaced number two, coming from the same supplier, now having moved to Wrotham Heath.

During the above forty year period, the halyard had several times been stolen, or had rotted, the poles had been climbed, usually at night so as not to encourage spectators. One time, however, again on a Saturday morning, Horace Tree, then a Server at St. John's and later Warden for over twenty years, called to say that the halyard was missing. He watched me climb the pole, threading the new rope through the pulley. Only when I had returned to terra firma did he remark 'Aren't you going to close the pulley cover '.....

In 1996, the third pole was looking very sorry for itself, quite rotten at the bottom. Our sister, Kathleen, had just died after twenty five years in St. Cecilia's Cheshire Home and we decided, with Canon Allen's permission to commemorate this with the fourth pole. By now our supplier was out of business and enquiries were made locally for ready-made poles. We discovered that poles were mainly fibreglass and more expensive than we had rashly bargained for. However, eventually the name of Harrison Bros. of Darlington was found who, after being drawn into the saga, showed interest and sympathy and offered to supply a second-hand pole at a reasonable cost. The pole was delivered, to all appearances new and was erected.

The old pole is now the flagpole at Kemnal's Own Scout Headquarters and their old pole now the Brownies' Maypole. THAT'S RECYCLING!

(Bill and Betty regaled us with this unusual story at the last Members' Evening when we were thoroughly entertained by the telling of it. A wonderful story from two born and bred Sedcopians. Afterwards, Betty was inspired to visit Local Studies and asked to see the local newspaper that would have reported the Wedding. She found the report, which was very different from that of today. It shows in detail, the wedding finery of The Groom, The Bride, Bridesmaids and Page. The Bride was given away by her father, The Vicar, Canon Spurgin and the Celebrant, Bishop Harmer was a previous Bishop of Rochester. The Wedding Gifts were all listed and I think the following may supplement Bill & Betty's story. The Groom gave the Bride a fur coat and she gave him a fitted suitcase. Mr & Mrs Seymour, parents of our Dr. John Seymour gave a bathroom cork stool, John is related to the Spurgin family. The 2nd Sidcup Brownies a fruit bowl and plates, 2nd Sidcup Guides a brass model of a Girl Guide. Bellringers of St. John's a cut glass vase and Mr & Mrs Tree and *Horace*, a glass vase. This must be the Horace Tree that Bill mentions later in the story as a Server and Church Warden for over twenty years. As I have been going down the lists, although I am not an early Sedcopian - have recognised surnames such as Leach, Knight, Townshend, Lepine and Evans. This, I think has been due to our local history meetings when these names have been part of the 19th and 20th century story of the inhabitants of Sidcup. It would be a marvellous exercise to sit with Bill and Betty placing all the guests into the context of Sidcup just prior to WW11. There is an advertisement at the bottom of the listing showing the Official Souvenir programme of the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on sale, selling at 1/- for the standard edition and 1/6d for the deluxe.) Editor

ON LIVING IN THE PENHILL PARK ESTATE

by Roy Hopper

Penhill Park is not outstandingly beautiful, but it does give a feeling of space and light and air. Football matches are played on it; I care nothing for football, but I like to see others enjoying it at weekends. When we moved to Rowley Avenue in 1969, it didn't strike me as being anything other than a convenient place to live. We had been married for six years, and had two young children, and I hadn't begun to develop my passion for local history. Yet the seeds were already sown. To start with, I had a childhood memory of Penhill Park, from the immediate post war years, when I went with my cousin, who lived in The Oval, to visit her friend in Rowley Avenue. All I can remember is a vast open space, lots of allotments, and a tall electricity pylon towering over the rows of beans and potatoes, like some giant sentinel, a guardian of the vegetables. It was a view of a different landscape, and it thrilled my young soul.

When I was a boy my parents gave me a programme of the official opening of Danson Park in 1926. I was intrigued by a rather small and poorly printed map of Sir John Boyd's estate, and thought that one day I would find out more about it. If anything got me going, it was maps, pictures of the landscape as it was, as it is now. I liked that sort of thing at school; geography, geology, topography, landscape, the way it has dictated man's occupation. Here in Rowley Avenue was stony, free draining soil, the Blackheath Beds, quite the reverse of the sticky clay in Annandale Road where we first lived, and in Oaklands Avenue where my parents raised their family. Our house in Rowley was at the highest point in this long street, and I soon knew fairly well all the humps and hollows round about. In the park was a small stream, which once flowed into the lake at Blendon Hall; it had made a little valley of its own. It was covered over several years ago, and the exceptional rainfall in October 2000 created a long lake there for a week, which was visited by local wildfowl. Soon after we moved in, a hole was dug in the park just beyond our back fence; this was for a 'recharge borehole', something mysterious to do with the Water Board and the Electricity Company. For me, it opened a view into the bowels of the earth; stony soil, then sandy, then chalk; no clay at all. Yet down in that hollow in the park the soil is quite sticky. So this alone was enough to convince me that Rowley Avenue and Penhill Park had something to offer, in the way of interest, to me at least.

An additional interest was created by the aircraft movements above the Park. One major reason for these was the fact that the main runway at Heathrow lay 24 miles away to the south west in a straight line. Also it seems that Danson Park Lake is a well-known aviator's landmark, a sort of turning point for pilots. Other aircraft movements were due to the proximity of Biggin Hill Airport, and more recently the Docklands Airport. Where away to the north we could actually see aircraft descending and taking off, though of course the airport was invisible. Not every one cares for such things, and there has been understandable concern about the proposed development of Biggin Hill, but both my wife and I have an RAF background, she being the daughter of an Officer and living in married quarters with her parents until 1958, and me having served my two years' National Service on a major front line bomber station in Norfolk. Therefore, we like aircraft and are interested in what's passing our way, and tend to rush outside if we hear anything promising: (Was that One of Ours, dear?) Coupled with the occasional sighting of something Really Old around Battle of Britain weekends at Biggin, it all tends to enhance the excitement of our home territory. At night we can see numerous landing lights of circling aircraft, stacked in order for their approach to Heathrow, and admire the rows of cabin lights and the red, green and white navigation lights as one passes

close overhead. Occasionally there is something more dramatic, when a Police helicopter circles round and round for ages, presumably in pursuit of some criminal element; and once an ambulance helicopter landed on the field to pick up an injured or sick person.

Nor is this the only aerial activity, as flights of geese and ducks are often seen and heard passing overhead, as they fly from Danson to Lamorbey Lakes, and back; there is something so wild and free about them, and they make a romantic sight and sound for us. We remember a song from our youth; 'My heart goes where the wild goose goes....?' There is contentment to be found in the simplest things! Another simple pleasure is watching the sunsets; we have a clear view to Shooters Hill in the north-west and of the Water Tower behind which the sun sets on Midsummer evening, and I have taken numerous photographs of colourful sunset skies. The Water Tower itself is a celebrated landmark and changes aspect and colour and even visibility, according to the time of day, season of the year, or the weather. When we moved here I knew that we must see it from the back of the house, couldn't at first spot it; this was simply because my expectation was of a very high hill, whereas in reality it forms a long, slow hump on the horizon, and is not at all dramatic seen from the south as we do.

The tall electricity pylon that I saw on my boyhood visit still sits in the Park, one of a long chain that heads towards Blackfen and beyond. It is in fact a new one that was erected a few years ago, somewhat nearer Rowley Avenue. At the same time they replaced the one in Sherwood Park Avenue with a new one on the north side of the Park, behind the houses. It was fascinating to watch these monsters being rewired. The cables pass diagonally over Rowley Avenue, just down the road from our house, and create a moaning sound when the wind blows strongly from the west. In damp or foggy weather there is a continuous crackling noise to be heard. The various shapes of electricity pylons around the country is another thing that interests me, and if I had a mind to do so, would make a very collectable photographic item! 'Our' pylon is on occasions a meeting place for flocks of starlings, when they gather thickly on the arms and the earth cable that connects each pylon to its neighbour, but never go too near the power lines themselves. The noise they make can be quite amazing, and I think of Chaucer's 'Parlement of Foules.' Again, many folk object to these steel monsters, and worry about the possible effects of electric radiation, but they are part of the landscape, and don't bother us at all.

Not until we paid off the mortgage in 1994 and the deeds of our house came into my hands, did my interest in the history of my own home patch start to grow. It had been 'all Chislehurst' at that time, a legacy of library days and endless questions asked. Even then, I had little time to investigate my own locality. I picked up bits and pieces, no more. Then two years ago a neighbour lent me a clutch of house deeds relating to Marlborough Park Estate; he had rescued them from a builder's skip, as so many have been in recent years. There maps of part of my patch, and I made notes, and learned about the area. Then last Christmas, Santa gave me a copy of Oliver Wooller's marvellous book, 'The Great Estate', and at long last all was revealed.

The land it seems, was once part of Penhill Farm in the large Lamorbey estate. The estate itself used to be part of the Archbishop of Canterbury's vast Manor of Bexley. Its first recorded owner was one Thomas Sparrow, deputy reeve of Bexley in 1495. In 1840 the estate took up about one quarter of the area of Bexley Parish, extending from Eltham in the west to Penhill Road in the east, but including Blendon Hall, and from Blackfen Road in the north to the Bexley-with-Footscray boundary in the south. This included all my old haunts, all Hopper territory since my parents came to live in

Oaklands Avenue in 1939; Days Lane, Blackfen, The Oval, Halfway Street, and the three linked open spaces of Holly Oak, Willersley and Marlborough Parks, with the River Shuttle flowing through them, which formed a natural playground for me and my brothers and friend when we were children. The river flows on into Lamorbey Park Golf Course, and eventually into the Cray at Hall Place, and at last into the Thames. It gave me a childhood glimpse of natural history and geography, which were two of my favourite subjects at Days Lane School, way back in the 1940's.

Oliver's book shed a great light on the Abstract of Title to our house. This started off with a roll call of names; 'John Malcolm of Poltalloch, Lochgilphead, in the County of Argyll, Esquire and Mortagor; and two others of the Malcolm clan, and the Honourable Egremont William Lascelles of Middlethorp Manor in the County of York, and Richard Robert Wingfield of Fairy Hill, Bray, County Wicklow, Esquire, Mortgagees.' The Malcolms had made a fortune from sugar plantations in Jamaica, and had built up a vast estate in their native Argyll. To this, says Oliver, 'they added a modest Kentish estate within easy reach of the Capital.' Modest to the but to me - to us - it is home. The Malcolms, as we know, were active in the local community, living at Lamorbey and doing good works. I won't trouble you with details; you can read all about it in Oliver Wooller's book. On page 102 is a portrait of Lord Malcolm of Poltalloch himself. a distinguished bearded gentleman, holding a book, and looking scholarly.

It is good to know something of the land you live on and who owned it; it may look pretty tame, and uninteresting, but when you start to scratch the surface, and recollect that apart from the immediate landscape, we are all at the hub of a positive galaxy of estates - Danson, Blendon, Hall Place, Mount Mascal, North Cray and Footscray Places, Frogal and Scadbury and Eltham Palace; and yes, away to the north, and clearly seen across the Park, there's the long slow hump of Shooters Hill, the old Roman Road; it really is an exciting place to live. Who could ask for anything more?

ANCIENT BRITONS

What's the good of wearing braces
Vests and pants and boots with laces
Spats or hats you buy in places
Down in Brompton Road
What's the use of shirts of cotton
Studs that always get forgotten
These affairs are simply rotten
Better far is woad.

Romans came across the Channel
All wrapped up in tin and flannel
Half a pint of woad per man'll
Dress us more than these.
Saxon you can waste your stitches
Building beds for bugs in breeches
We have woad to clothe us which is
Not a nest for fleas

Woad the stuff to show men
Woad to scare your foemen,
Boil it to a brilliant blue
And rub it on your back and your abdomen
Ancient Briton never hit on
Anything as good as woad to fit on
Neck or knees or where you sit on
Tailors you be blowed!

Romans keep your armours
Saxon your pyjamas,
Hairy coats were meant for goats
Gorillas, yaks, retriever dogs and llamas.
Tramp up Snowdon with our Woad on
Never mind if we get rained or snowed on,
Never want a button sewed on
Go it Ancient B's.

At the last Society meeting of 2000/2001 there was a talk on dyestuffs one of which was woad. Alan Godfrey says that many years ago he learnt this camp fire song about Woad which should be sung to the tune of 'Men of Harlech'

MEMBERS' EVENING - 2000

Peter Granger

The connection between the Zulu Wars, Sidcup in 1892 and the Flagpole at St. John's Church may not be immediately obvious, but these were some of the subjects of talks given at the February meeting of Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society. This is an annual event at which members are invited, cajoled or otherwise persuaded to speak to their colleague on any subject of their choice. This year's topics also included an account of the perils and hardships endured by British settlers in South Africa during the early 1800's and recollections of the grounds of Crystal Palace. The Society's interest in local history was not neglected as the subjects included the development of Penhill Park and Abbey Hill Millennium Woodland, also information about the Reminiscence Centre at Blackheath. And the Flagpole? This was an account of its installation in 1937, just in time for the marriage by the Bishop, of Canon Spurgeon's daughter Mary, the history of making good the result of vandalism and the procurement and installation of replacement poles over the subsequent fifty years.

THE RUXLEY WALK

Eric Percival

The first of the Summer Walks on 16th May was entitled 'Hidden Sidcup'. Many of us have driven past or over the old gravel pit workings at Ruxley without knowing the delights to be found there. The Reserve is managed by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation in collaboration with Orpington Angling Association and Southern Water and consists of a series of lakes formed by the excavation of gravel between 1929 and 1951. Almost 200 different plant and animal species have been recorded there so far. On the evening of our visit, members met at the entrance on the busy road joining the two roundabouts of Ruxley and Crittalls Corner, and were there joined by the Ranger as entrance is only permitted by arrangement with the Conservation Trust. He led us in convoy an enclosed safe parking area as regrettably vandals are sometimes busy there, then followed an enjoyable tour of the Reserve with the ever present Canada Geese, many complete with week old goslings. The site is home to many birds, some migratory, others wintering here. The evening ended with our thanks to the Ranger and as we emerged into the modern world, the speed cameras were busy a few yards away.

MEMORIES OF SCHOOL DAYS

by Anne Brunton

From 1944 to 1956 I lived in Water Road, Walmer, a suburb of Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The school I attended up to the age of 11 was called Clarendon Park Primary. Sounds very English doesn't it? The Kindergarten or Infants was called Sub A and Sub B.

The school was set in an enormous area where groundspace was not a problem, and the education system, though modelled on the English system, was slightly different. The year went from January to December, with four terms and no half term holidays. We had two weeks at Easter when it was starting to cool, two short 'winter' holidays in June and September, and a month's summer holiday at Christmas when it was fairly sizzling. School started at 7.30am and finished at 2.30pm with two fifteen minute

breaks and half an hour for lunch. Classrooms were spacious, light and airy. The teachers were all from English backgrounds, with the occasional Afrikaans teacher filling in. The Afrikaans language was compulsory and some lessons were in that tongue. Most of the children were of British stock, but there were a few Afrikaans children, known to us as 'Boets'. We never had a black or coloured mixed race child in the classroom. This was a time of segregation, and at the time of course I never questioned it. Later my parents moved us all up to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), a much more liberal place then, to get away from the apartheid that divided the country.

Empire Day on May 24th was always celebrated. Schools would participate in huge rallies where national songs and dances were performed—Scottish dancing and Dutch 'Voortrekker Spiel' and a final rendering of 'God Save The King'.

My most vivid memory was during Assembly on 6th February 1952 when it was announced that King George VI had died. Shock and horror was evident on the teachers' faces - some of them crying. We couldn't figure out what would happen now the King was dead. To me England was a place the other side of the world where my Aunt lived. She used to send me Enid Blyton books, to the envy of my friends. I am still in close contact with one of the friends who shared those schooldays with me. Our school caretaker, who lived on site in his own small house, took a pride in the school. His name was Shadrack and we were told not to talk to him as he was 'only the caretaker'!! But on the whole we ignored this. I often wondered what happened to him.

We were given homework and I never did it on time. I would realise I had not done my sums or my writing and would sit on the pavement on the way to school as the cars flashed by, trying to catch up with my work. I got a detention for doing my arithmetic so badly. I loathed and detested any sort of arithmetic and was not helped by being told 'you're a dud when it comes to sums'.

They were days of relative freedom. We walked or cycled the two miles to school. It was never in the dark and it rarely rained, though it could be cold enough to leave a frost on the grass in the early morning, but it was gone by midday. There were no school dinners so everyone brought their own packed lunch.

I went back to the school in 1989 and was amazed at the size it had grown into. I also met my former Headmistress, Whom I remembered as being small and neat, but with a voice and manner that instilled considerable anxiety. To be sent to 'see Mrs Jordan' was an experience not to be repeated at any cost. When I met her again she still had the same spark but was so very tiny I could not believe that anyone that size could carry so much authority. I'm glad to say she never remembered me for anything too good or too bad, so I guess I must have been a normal schoolgirl.

MEMORIES OF SCHOOL DAYS AT SIDCUP

by Phyllis Parker

The second church school in Lamorbey which we now use as a church hall was built in 1880-1881 on land given by John Malcolm, adjoining it was the house for the headmaster. The Incumbent of the parish at that time was Samuel Beamish. An extra classroom was built on in 1895 and that is where I started my schooling in 1917. In those days the part of the building which we now use as the main entrance and toilets was part of the school house and would have been the sitting room. If you go outside you will see above our door, the windows of the main bedroom. To the left of the door you will see a bricked-up doorway - this was one of the entrances to the school and

opened into a long porch at the end of which a door led out into the playground. (The car park now) Here we hung hats and coats before going through the door leading to the classrooms. The main hall you see today was divided into three, first by a glass partition which folded back and secondly by a pair of large doors. At the end of the middle room and also from the third room were doors which opened on to another porch which contained a very large stone sink (inkwells were washed here) and the door at the end of this porch was the exit to the playground and also to the outside lavatories. If instead of going out you turned to the right - there was the door of the extra classroom this is easily recognisable today. It was used as the infants room and there were two teachers in my day - Miss Berry and Miss Winter - they lived in Days Lane. The heating of each room was by a large coal fire in an open grate, protected by a guard. Remembering that above us, under the roof, were just rafters - (with modernisation these are no longer seen) - we were never too hot! Going back to the room nearest the house - here, there was platform which folded back on to the wall and it was let down for us on special occasions - it was about three feet from the floor - the dividing doors would be opened for the whole school to assemble. The steeple contained a bell - the rope of which came through the roof down into the middle class. It was rung for morning and afternoon sessions. Many of the pupils came from Days Lane or Corbylands Road or Penhill and there being no school meals in those days they would have the long walk to school and back, twice in one day. I was lucky living just along Hurst Road - it was called Bexley Lane then and it really was just a lane!

Apart from the playgrounds being used at playtimes, they were also used for organised sport - the boys played football and the girls, netball and there were rounders. Being asphalt, it was rough on your knees if you happened to fall! By today's standard, I suppose our school building left much to be desired but we had teachers who were patient and kind - who gave us a good basic education which has been useful, yet more than that we received also a good education in the Christian Faith - I will always be glad that I went to Lamorbey School.

SOCIETY VISIT TO CAMBRIDGE - APRIL 21ST 2001

by Gill Brown

We set out from Sidcup with a full coach and an overcast sky. The weather had been dull and rainy all week so we were expecting much of the same.

Our coffee stop was at Polhill Nursery at Coton, it is a younger version of the one at Badger's Mount. On the way to the coffee stop we had a vote as to whether we should risk our tea stop as we would be in the open air. It was agreed that we should. After coffee and cakes and plant purchases we set off for Cambridge.

On our arrival we met the three guides who were to take us on a tour of the city. We learned of the foundation of the colleges and the animosity between 'Town and Gown'. The ages of the colleges vary from medieval and modern, being endowed by Kings, Queens and industrialists.

We were taken to Kings College Chapel. It is impossible to describe the beauty of the Chapel. It is magnificent. The stained glass has been saved twice - once from Cromwell's soldiers who seemed to have forgotten to come and destroy it. The second time was during the second world war when it was removed and stored underground somewhere. There are beautiful stone and wooden carvings. If you haven't seen it go, go, go at the earliest opportunity. The rest of Cambridge is fine too!

We set off for tea at the 'Orchard' in Grantchester. It is exactly as its name implies - an apple orchard with a small tea-room. However, tea is taken outside, sitting in deckchairs under the trees. This is why we were concerned about the weather. We had booked ahead and our tea was waiting for us. We had tables surrounded by directors chairs (not deckchairs, after all) and tea was scones, cream and jam as well and the cup that cheers. The 'Orchard' has been a tea-room for about a century and was frequented by poets such as Rupert Brooke and other authors and philosophers. Nearby is the Old Vicarage which was made famous by Rupert Brooke in his poem and infamous by its current resident (not actually resident at the moment as he is in prison) Jeffrey Archer!

OUTING TO WINDSOR

By Anne Brunton

On 23rd May a coachload of local historians set off for Windsor, visiting Runnymede for a welcome coffee break on the way. It was a beautiful sunny day, Runnymede Meadows beckoned, and it would have been nice to have had time to take a look at the memorials to John F Kennedy and to the allied airmen with no known grave but that would have to wait for another occasion and we pressed on to Windsor, arriving in the midst of a monumental traffic jam. Our driver skilfully reversed his way out and approached the town centre another way, dropping us at the top of Castle Hill, where some people wandered off to explore the town independently and the rest of us joined Frances for a group entrance to the Castle.

Approaching the Castle brought back many memories for me. As a student midwife in the 1960's I lived in what was then a nurses home, but is now a business centre, directly opposite the Henry VIII Gate. While we were there a colleague of mine delivered a baby for the wife of one of the stonemasons of St. George's Chapel who lived in the Horseshoe Cloisters which face the entrance to the Chapel. The stonemason was so delighted with his new baby that he obtained tickets for us to watch the Order of the Garter ceremony. For me it was an unforgettable experience of pomp and pageantry carried out with effortless grace and precision timing.

Once inside the castle the group was free to wander wherever we pleased. We started with a look at Queen Mary's Doll's House, perfect in its one twelfth detail and its lights, lifts and water supply, all in working order since going on display in 1924. However the subdued lighting in the room did make some of the detail hard to take in. The special exhibition of paintings from the Royal Collection was very interesting. The emphasis was plainly on the Victorian age and included some very presentable water colours painted by Queen Victoria herself.

Many of us had not visited the State Apartments since before the fire of 1992. What a wedding anniversary present that was for the Queen! Although the fire had destroyed a lot of the building, much of the contents had been removed to enable re-wiring to take place and there was sufficient time to save nearly all of the priceless paintings, tapestries and furniture. Most of the Grinling Gibbons carving has survived. The restoration of St. George's Hall and the other damaged rooms is a tribute to the craftsmen who worked for five years with such skill and patience. There is an excellent exhibition which displays the history of Windsor Castle from its beginnings as a wooden keep built by William the Conqueror, through successive reigns and reconstructions up to the fire and restoration in 1997.

St. George's Chapel was to be the venue that night for a concert by the Bach Chorale and we were privileged to hear them rehearsing while we walked round and enjoyed its

magnificent architecture. We found all the staff to be very knowledgeable and helpful, and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit.

Many thanks to Frances & Gill for arranging such a great day out.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU !

by Bess Dzielski

The Society meets regularly through the academic year and numbers reached the optimum that the Adult Education Centre will allow. This means there can be over a hundred of us milling around, and although many friendships have been formed it is still possible to have little idea of some of our fellow members, so it seems it could be interesting to run some brief biographies in the Newsletter. Most people take pleasure in knowing about others; I do these biographies elsewhere for another society and find that not only are people interested to know about others, but some surprising facts can also emerge! If the subjects of these short accounts aren't already known by sight Frances will introduce them at one of the meetings.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU - NUMBER ONE - PHYLLIS PARKER

Phyllis is a very pleasant grey-haired lady who sits near the front at meetings and she and I have smiled at one another at various Mothers' Union events. In many ways she is typical of a generation of mature ladies recognisable as stalwarts of a suburban society! But what about the words Berkeley Square and Norman Hartnell - yes he the dressmaker of the Thirties who developed the unique style by which we recognise the Queen Mother. Before the war Phyllis served a four year apprenticeship as a Court Dressmaker with Paulette of Berkeley Square, worked her way up through the system, first as dressmaker's assistant and then as a Gown Hand, working in her time for both Jacquemar and Hartnell.

Like so many others the Second World War interrupted this luxury trade and in the early war years she worked variously for Sainsburys at several sites returning to Sidcup in 1941 to be with her family and to work as a cashier for Vickers-Armstrong of Crayford. Their offices had been evacuated to North Cray Place but after a V1 fell in the grounds shattering windows and ceilings the offices returned to Crayford and Phyllis worked there until her retirement in 1972.

These years of retirement have not been wasted. Phyllis joined the Local History Society when it still met at Lamorbey Park and has been a regular member ever since. She has always been an enthusiastic traveller ranging round the world - Canada, Australia, The Algarve, Corfu, Italy and Germany. Her hobbies and pastimes include Walking, Reading visiting Museums and Galleries, attending lectures, enjoying Old Time Dancing, and of course, Sewing.

It's been quite a life for a girl who left Lamorbey Church of England School at the age of fourteen with no special qualifications and whose first job was as a domestic help. There's a lot she could talk about at the next Members' Evening - we must make sure that she does!

GETTING TO KNOW YOU - NO.2 - VALERIE ALLEN

If ever a Society had a stand-up comedienne, it's us, in the person of Valerie Allen! Members' Evenings, Socials, any meeting with audience participation - we can depend on Val to entertain us with poetry, anecdote or just chat. Where she gets it from I don't know, but no evening is complete without her contribution.

Supported as always by loyal Leslie, Val has been a member of the Society since 1979. She was encouraged to join by hearing a talk on Old Sidcup given by Beverley Nunns at a meeting of the Women's Action Group at St. Andrews Church. Much of her interest lies in church membership and work; she is responsible there for distributing the parish magazine.

Valerie Hall, the middle child of three is a Sedcopian born and bred but one of the generation who moved into the new estates being built here between the wars. The family lived in Valliers Wood Road 'burying themselves in the country' as their parents expressed it, after a move from Leytonstone. The Halls were a musical family, Mum was a music teacher and Dad Ralph, originally an accountant will be remembered by many people as the organist at the Holy Redeemer Church for a number of years. School life was Halfway Street Infants School, Burnt Oak Lane Junior School then Alma Road School for Girls. Later in the war when Sidcup became an evacuation area Val went to Oxford attending a Church of England Convent School. Post-war she had a scholarship to Sidcup Technical School and completed a secretarial course at Coopers in Chislehurst.

She comments that her youthful membership of the Girls Training Corps was prompted by the desire to get to know boys in the Naval Cadets! These, indeed, might have been some of the lads with whom she shared her love of ballroom dancing. But she landed up eventually with Leslie Allen from Birkbeck Road.

But a living had to be earned. In her first job with a publishing company she recalls being so inefficient that she brought home the contents of the waste bin for the first few weeks in case she got the sack for wasting paper! But she couldn't have done too badly and subsequently worked for the J Arthur Rank Organisation for five years until her marriage to Leslie in 1953.

By the time their children David & Melanie were growing up Val returned for what she thought would be a short stint at work just to oil the financial wheels, but which continued until she retired at sixty after a number of increasingly important jobs.

So now they have more time to spend with the five grandchildren, for reading and holidays, for voluntary work with the WRVS and Friends of Queen Mary's. Leslie has also been a member of the Society for many years and at the end of each meeting we shall still see Val and Leslie creeping out quietly to catch their taxi if the speaker goes on too long.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU - NO.3 - BETTY MARTYN

You may recall a recent Members' Evening when Betty Martyn and her brother Bill Belsham gave a lively account of the saga of the flagpole at St. John's Church, Sidcup. So they seemed an obvious choice to include in this new series. Betty gave me an interesting account of her life and times, but Bill has proved quite elusive - whether shy, wary or busy I'm not too sure. Both, however, are Sedcopians, two of five siblings, born in Blackhorse Road, Sidcup but an early move to Grassington Road a house then newly built by their father and in which Bill still lives. And this is where he disappears from my story.

Betty was educated at Sidcup National School in Birkbeck Road, then Sidcup Central School in Alma Road, which is where we now meet and then on to the newly-opened Sidcup Commercial School in Station Road (now the Music Centre) where she acquired office and commercial skills which have led to a number of impressive jobs. Beginning with Sir Robert MacAlpine's she worked on projects during the war including

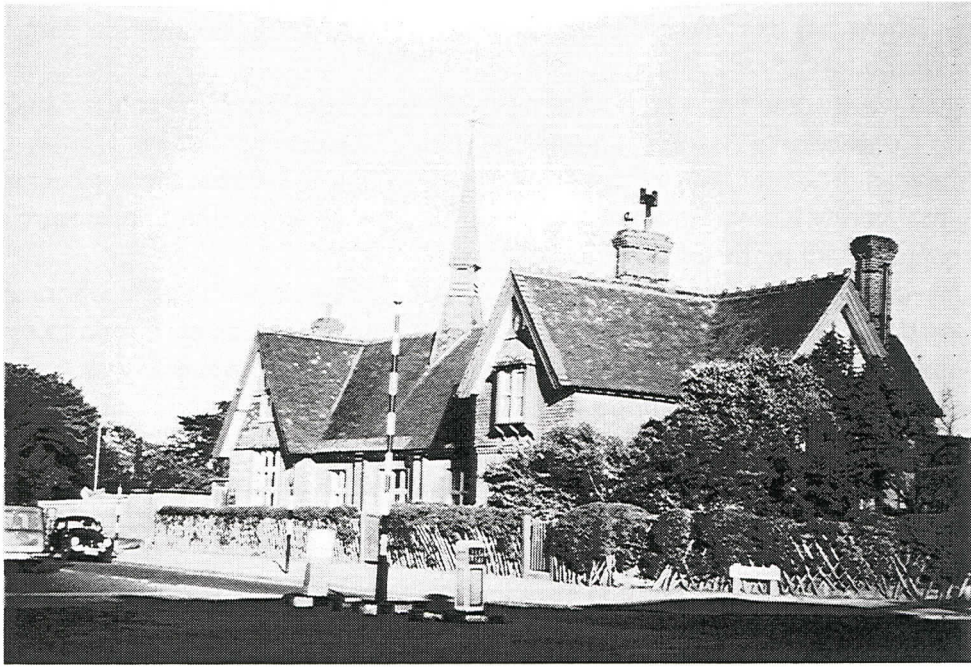
Boscombe Down and Fairfield airfields and had a very hush hush connection with Mulberry Harbour.

Returning to work some years later after raising a family she went first to the Chislehurst and Sidcup Conservative Association touching glory by working with Pat Hornsby Smith ('the glamorous redhead of the Tory Party'). Back in London life she became secretary to Andrew Knox, the senior partner of Linklaters and Paines, apparently a name to conjure with in the legal field.

Betty finished work in 1985 ready to spend a happy retirement with Ralph whom she married in 1944. Theirs was a romance of the wartime variety - meet, decide to marry on his embarkation leave, rush through a Special Licence, marry a week later, and the next week become a single war-bride while Ralph did two years in the Far East. But she points out that they've been together now for fort - no! fifty seven years. Absence was obviously good for a fond heart. They have been settled for many years in Durham Road and have produced a son and daughter and seven grandchildren and her account of life together shows a happy and devoted couple.

Ralph worked for Chislehurst and Sidcup Libraries where I remember him as a pleasant and helpful colleague, before transferring to the new London Borough of Bromley to become the Librarian of Orpington.

Their retirement years have been productive too. They travel a great deal, support many local groups and societies and are keen music lovers. As members of Queen Mary's League of Friends they derive much satisfaction in helping with the ward rounds of trolleys for patient sales, which gives them an opportunity for a positive contribution in personal contact with anyone who needs help or just a chat. They diverge at one point however, Ralph a dedicated artist attends his painting class at Alma Road while Betty joins us in Local History, which she announces she wouldn't miss for anything - not even joining Ralph to paint!



Phyllis Parker's School at Lamorbey
Now the Holy Trinity Church Hall, corner of Hurst Rd. & Station Rd.



Devastation at Five Arches Bridge, Footscray Meadows
July, 2001

Francis Evans
wedding

Jack Saunders died

Anne Francis → I 21 years
in Society

exhibitions 75 - '86

Physics collection of M.T. School

Lamorby & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY