

ARCHIVES

Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2004

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LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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All the articles are written by members of Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society

EDITORIAL - SPRING 2004
Frances Percival - Editor & Secretary

I have as usual enjoyed setting up the newsletter with some of the articles reminding me of our society activities. Bess Dzielski continues with her pen portraits of our members with this time one on Gill Brown and another on Dave & Janette Cunliffe. We particularly salute Janette who takes away our used Christmas Cards and creates from them gift labels for selling at meetings for the following Christmas. She adds funds to the Society each year for which we thank her.

Janet Cooper has slipped effortlessly into the office of Treasurer impressing us with her thoughts on our financial future.

Taking on the role of programme secretary is no sinecure as I know having done it for the last twenty years. When I was ill two years ago, Denise Baldwin contacted speakers and so finished the year's programme. She enjoyed it so much that she has retained the task and I am sure you will agree that good speakers have been coming to our society meetings. So, thank you Denise.

Jackie Evans has been attending the Sidcup Partnership meetings for us and her reports as you can imagine, are very illuminating and very much to the point.

We thank Judith Hobbs for her time as Minute Secretary and now welcome Dorothy Connelly into that post.

A year or so ago, Denise Baldwin handed over the file containing 'Memories of your School Days'. I was amazed at the number of members that had participated in this project which has now become part of the articles within the newsletter. They are being used with each edition but I have lots more to include, so if your item has not appeared yet, please be patient, it hasn't been lost but will eventually be revealed!!

During the year we have lost four society members, Millie Salmon, Joan Farrell, Phyllis Parker and John Seymour. Their obituaries appear at the end of this newsletter.

This last year has been one of organising a venue change which came about due to a different policy within the Adult Education set-up within Bexley and indeed as a national policy. We were advised in a letter from the Principal. Mr Richard Easterbrook dated 1st April 2003 that 'the Governors had agreed that over the next two years, clubs and societies should a) become part of the College's quality controlled programme or b) opt to rent space from the College'. We had already intimated that our preferred option was to rent space, however as we met fortnightly we would be charged for the alternate week. A further condition was 'taught classes would have priority of choice of accommodation'. At a society meeting a ballot was held which resulted in the committee being requested to seek other accommodation for the society. This decision was conveyed to Mr Easterbrook, when it was decided that the usual conditions would apply to us until May 2004. This then gave us time to seek a new venue.

We take this opportunity of thanking the staff at Alma Road for their courtesy and help in many directions during our time at the College.

So, from September 2004 the Society will meet at St. Lawrence's Hall, Main Road, Sidcup which will then become the Society's third venue within its 50 year history.

It is hoped that the Society will settle down in another part of Sidcup having been in Lamorbey for so long. After all our Society title is Lamorbey & Sidcup LHS.

DONATIONS TO THE SOCIETY

We record with thanks the £100 that was donated to the Society by Katherine Harding and Denise Baldwin from the proceeds of their book 'Along the River Cray'. Equally, we were pleased to receive via Jean Davis, £200 from the late Joan Farrell. Both these amounts will be used on microphone and projection equipment that we shall need to buy for our new venue in September, 2004.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU SERIES - JANETTE & DAVE CUNLIFFE

by Bess Dzielski

It would be quite invidious to say that any one member of the Society is more important than the others, but I have to remark that as far as our Quiz Team is concerned that is the absolute truth! For Dave Cunliffe knows more about science than the rest of us put together. While we may all dispute with each other over quotations and history we just keep our heads down and nod enthusiastically when he comes up with an answer to a question that most of us barely understood. For his CV tells us that this scion of Chislehurst & Sidcup Grammar School for Boys graduated from the Imperial College of Science and Technology with a BSc.Chem and honours following his start in life at Longlands Primary School. Work has taken him into computer programming, systems analysis and he now works in project management providing guidance to Civil Service projects.

But the awe with which I regard Dave is balanced by the rapport I feel with Janette who, although now working as an accountant qualified as a librarian from Ealing College of Further Education. She laments that like many of her year she graduated when stringent cuts were being made in local government - indeed a period when full-time staff were being replaced by unqualified part-timers - and Janette's ambitions had to be shelved. Unlike Dave who spent his youth locally, Janette was a Catford girl attending Torridon Road School moving to Sidcup on their marriage in 1986, but unlike Dave whose youthful memories are of sweetshops and cinemas, hers are of Sunday School attendance at St.Andrew's, Catford and Guiding. She has been an adult leader since 1980, has run the pack as Brown Owl since 2000 and is an enthusiastic supporter of work with the young; which means that her interest in the community has been maintained although outside libraries.

They first met on an outing on a Thames River Boat and their shared enthusiasms include walking and foreign holidays. They are long-standing members of the Society from Lamorbey Park days, and we know that at Christmas Janette will fundraise for the Society with her attractive gift labels. And since they are among the younger element we hope to see them around for a good while in the future.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU - GILL BROWN

By Bess Dzielski

With over a hundred members it's not always easy to know everyone's name - so Gill Brown is the one who sits at the back of the room at meetings smilingly taking your money! In preparing for this profile Gill gave me some notes on her life and career. What she didn't mention was the fact that registers most strongly with me - she knows

an awful lot about Dickens! Gill is a member of the Society's Quiz team and she is the one to whom we automatically defer over the great Victorian novelist.

She was a Croydon girl, educated at Croydon Parish School and later at the Old Palace School in Croydon. During time living in Addiscombe with her two sisters she attended Woodside School and remembers with great pleasure one teacher in particular who encouraged her - perhaps that's where the Dickens connection comes from. She was prevented from further education by the death of her father and began work in an insurance office in Finsbury Square.

She married and had a baby and the family, moved from Bromley to a farm in Hertfordshire but the country didn't suit the gregarious Gill - not enough people! So a return was made to civilisation - yes she actually means Sidcup - in 1966, this time with her three children.

By the time they were at senior school she was a single mother and back in the working market, did a course at Woolwich College to retrain her office skills, returned to insurance work and became the complete commuter - twenty three years travelling on the Dartford Loop.

She still works hard in retirement, a computer course, adult education classes, Red House volunteer, holidays abroad and time spent with two grandchildren. She ended her notes by saying 'I never wanted to climb Everest or drag a sledge to the South Pole' but I have a distinct feeling she could be open to suggestion!

RECORD OF THE SOCIETY'S OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

LONDON'S CITY HALL AND SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL

by Dawn & Roy Cole

The arrangement was to meet at Sidcup Station on Saturday, 1st March, 2003, where most people congregated in the waiting room against the cold. The train was a few minutes late but eventually the large party of us piled on the train to London Bridge and then much noise was generated as we all caught up with news from members we hadn't been able to speak to for a while. We left the train and crocodile fashion were led off to City Hall which to my mind resembles an out of shape beehive. Some minutes were taken up with the security checks which someone suggested was an added entertainment to watch members with arms outstretched having a wand waved over them checking for explosives. No one to my knowledge resented this but everyone regretted the necessity. Once in, we had time to wander alone through the building. We took the lift to the ninth floor and then out on the walkway to see some spectacular views of our London. Many old buildings were still to be seen but a tremendous amount of new building was going on, some new obscuring the old and lots of glass in the construction. We took the circular ramp down inside the building and passed the open plan offices which looked very untidy and we thought provision should have been made for cupboards to hide the many cardboard boxes on top of cabinets. We also thought there were many faults appearing the building considering it was a new structure. Still we envy Ken (Livingstone) his wonderful views.

Time then for lunch before meeting at HMS Belfast for a short stroll to Southwark Cathedral. The weather up till then had been fine but the gradual raindrops became a downpour just as we reached the Cathedral but no one was too wet. We divided into two groups and the first thing our guide showed us was part of the old cathedral which came to light when excavating for the extension and also the remains of a kiln which had

been preserved. The flagstone at the entrance showed that Nelson Mandela had opened the new building in place of Archbishop Tutu who was too ill to attend. Then to the Education Department where schoolchildren are invited to dress up in historical costumes - a great idea which proves very popular. Next, the Gary Weston Library (he of the biscuit family). This is a new building, the ceiling of which resembles an upturned boat. One wall comprised a half finished modern stained glass window which we found particularly pleasing. Our guide, Jo, then took us to the Cathedral itself and gave us some very interesting information about the history and life of the Cathedral. At that time the organ was being played softly and we all thought, 'how lovely'. Then the Choir and Organist began a rehearsal and it was very difficult to hear what Jo was saying. Each time she stopped because the competition was too loud - they stopped - she resumed and so did they! Her efforts were very much appreciated but we all felt for her and for her voice. We proceeded round the back of the choir and learned more and more. Then off to the interactive exhibition, the shop and home. A really good day out, unrushed, interesting and well organised.

THAMES PATH WALK

By Gill Brown

On the 2nd May, 2003 - a rather dull Friday - a group of us left Cutty Sark Station for a walk along the Thames Path towards Deptford.

Fortunately for us the Path does not run by the river all the way but has to weave its way around the backs of warehouses old and new, which gave our leader, Gloria Dixon, a chance to tell us of the fascinating history of the area.

It would be impossible to record all that we saw so I shall pick out what I thought were some of the highlights. We saw the steps where Queen Elizabeth knighted Sir Walter Raleigh, and the victualling warehouses built in the 17th century. It started to rain when we were approaching St. Nicholas's Church and fortunately for us it was open so we went inside to shelter. We sat on a very creaky bench and heard more of the history until the rain eased off. Gloria told us to look at the skull and crossbones over the gateway and wondered if it was the inspiration for the pirate flags.

We walked through Stave Park which is all that is left of the house and grounds of the diarist, John Evelyn's property. He never actually lived there but at one time let it out to the Tsarevich Peter later to be known as Peter the Great. Peter came to Deptford to see how ships were built. He brought with him a huge retinue and managed to wreck the house. Evelyn had grown a long hedge around the property of which he was very proud only to discover that Peter and his friends had cut a large hole in it so that they could have races through it. Peter only stayed in the area for four months but he managed to leave his mark. There is a rather strange but attractive statue commemorating his visit to Deptford. It is in three parts - a throne, a statue of Peter himself, which looks about 8-9 feet tall and a dwarf.

The docks are still there with all their original names but instead of working cranes and warehouses they are surrounded by smart, attractive and I'm sure, very expensive flats. As we got closer to Canada Water we seemed to go into the country. We walked through woodland beside a stream which was actually a canal. We emerged from the wood and climbed a manmade hill. Although it was only 65 ft. high we had a marvellous view all round - especially of the City of London.

I think we all enjoyed ourselves in spite of the dull weather as there was so much to see and hear about in such an historic part of London.

VISIT TO WALTHAM ABBEY & INGATESTONE HALL - 17th May 2003
by Dorothy Ryder

Sidcup Station at 8.45am - what an early start it better be worth it!!!

No one usually plays a joke on Frances but the naughty coach driver did not park in the usual place. We could see a coach down the approach but we all thought it was not ours. Departure time almost arrived, still no coach so someone went to the coach already there and you have guessed it, as the driver was early, he thought it was a better place to wait.

We had a good journey to Waltham Abbey car park from where we walked through the Country Park to the Abbey. Frances and her team had in the usual way arranged for the party to split in two with one half visiting the Abbey with a guide whilst the rest of us had coffee and scones in the Tourist Office cafe. Then it was our turn to see the Abbey. Our guide was a very knowledgeable young man who wanted us to know everything about the place but I would have liked to have looked at the Abbey in more detail. It was smaller than I expected with a beautiful Burne Jones stained glass window. Recently, a disturbed man had entered the Abbey wielding an axe with which he did a lot of damage to windows and especially the reredos. Nevertheless it was still a place of beauty with a long history going back to Harold, King of England.

We then went on to the Saxon church of Greensted, the oldest wooden church in the country. It is very small and ancient but very well preserved. It had some small stained glass windows and was decorated with flowers as there was to be a wedding so our visit was rather short but interesting. The lane we had used to get there was very narrow and some of the wedding party seemed amazed to see a coach. Our driver did a good job negotiating our way out, even if some of us had our eyes closed.

Our next stop was Chelmsford where we immediately had some lunch. Our aim after the meal was to find the Cathedral. We did and were greeted by some very pleasant music. In the evening there was to be a jazz concert with Humphery Lyttleton. The chairs had been turned round, with extra ones being added and a stage in place with all the sound equipment, lights etc. On speaking to one of the stewards we were told that the Cathedral was used as a venue for many events for the townspeople. Chelmsford seemed a very lively town but the walk to and from the car park was very relaxing as we wandering beside the river.

Our last stop was Ingatestone Hall where we were welcomed at the gates by the Estate Manager, who gave us a very interesting talk on the history of the Hall. It is a Tudor Mansion and over many years and generations the Petre family have filled the house with furniture and objects of their liking. It is a large building and showed that it was lived in and loved by the family. After a cup of tea and home-made cake we made our way back to the coach for our journey home after a most enjoyable day in an area of new territory for most of us. Well done and thank you, Frances, Gill and Eric.

VISIT TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT - 19th MAY, 2003
by Margaret Downham

The visit had a great start - we were met at St. Stephen's entrance by Mr Derek Conway, our Member of Parliament and then had our photos taken by his Wife, Collette in front of the beautiful gate. He took us inside where we met our guide for the tour, Mr Malcolm Maxwell who was also a doorkeeper. As a doorkeeper he wears a black dress suit with a badge of office on a chain round his neck and attends to the Speaker of the House and MP's when the Commons are sitting.

We were shown into the Throne Room where the Queen is robed for the Ceremony of the Opening of Parliament. The Throne was used by Queen Victoria with a small footstool as she was very short - only 4 ft. 11 ins tall. Paintings and furniture in this room were on permanent loan from Osborne House, Queen Victoria's home on the Isle of Wight. Murals depict the legendary Knights of the Round Table. From here, Her Majesty proceeds into the House of Lords when the members of the House of Commons are also summoned. When we entered the House of Lords, we all gasped at the splendour of the Chamber which is not as large as you might expect. The gold throne is breathtaking and it is from here that the Queen addresses her Lords and Commons.

We passed through into the lobby of the House of Commons where the live broadcasts take place covering the news with Andrew Marr, the political editor for the BBC and Mark Mardell for ITV. It is also the area where MP's meet with their constituents. There are statues here of previous Prime Ministers, one being Sir Winston Churchill whose feet are still touched by MP's for good luck.

Then we saw the door of the House of Commons with its indentations where Black Rod had summoned the MP's to join Her Majesty in the House of Lords. The Queen never enters the Commons Chamber. No reigning monarch has done this since the time of Charles 1. The House of Commons is very plain and is in stark contrast to that of the Lords. In both Houses we saw the paraphernalia of microphones hanging from the ceiling, cameras and auditory systems.

We then went into Westminster Hall which is the oldest part of the Houses of Parliament where tables laden with food used to stretch up the Hall for banquets for the entertainment of foreign dignitaries. During Medieval times the guests would feast alongside the pikestaffs around the Hall which carried the rotting heads of those who had been beheaded. Up the steps in the Hall is a fairly small area where Judicial Courts were set up and where Charles 1 was tried and consequently beheaded at the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall. Westminster Hall would have priority if there was a general alert over the rest of the site. The Hall is where members of the Royal Family have 'Lain in State'. The late, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother who died in 2002 laid in state there which coincided with the year of the Queen's Jubilee. Sir Winston Churchill was so revered that when he died he also laid in state and was given a state funeral.

Mr Maxwell our guide made our visit memorable as he also described the workings of Parliament and how bills become law. He showed us where the volumes of Hansard were kept - the verbatim reports of the parliamentary sessions.

And lastly that during the day when the Union Flag is flown or at night when the light is shining within the clocktower, Parliament is sitting.



Lamorbey & Sidcup Local Historical Society
Houses of Parliament Tour - 19th May 2003

OUTING TO WELLINGTON ARCH & APSLEY HOUSE by Marie & Den Brittain

Our Outing was arranged for the 25th October, 2003, which was also the day that Railtrack had decided that they would do maintenance work on the line from Sidcup to Lewisham. This meant that we had to catch a feeder bus from Sidcup to Lewisham and then proceed from there. Also work was being done between Charing Cross & London Bridge!! When we got to Lewisham we decided to take the option of going to Victoria and then caught a bus up to Wellington Arch. At that time only four of us had arrived, and the English Heritage Staff invited us to go up to the balcony, as the Mounted Guard for Buckingham Palace was shortly due to go past on its way to the Palace.

From the top of the Arch we had a very good view and after the Guards had past, we went inside for coffee and biscuits. Shortly after this several more of our party had arrived and we were given an introductory talk by a very enthusiastic member of staff. We were told of the history of the building which was very interesting. After this we left to wander around looking at the pictures and exhibits. Then we were told at the Guards would be on their way back from the Palace, so out on to the balcony once again. When they arrived we were treated to the sight of a rider being dismounted and his horse going into the road at Hyde Park Corner which could have been very serious had the traffic not been held up by the police. The horse however had been well trained because it stopped quite still in the middle of the road, until it was taken in control by one of the army personnel from a van that follows the Guards back to barracks in case something like this happens. After this we dispersed for lunch.

We all met up again at Apsley House (No.1, London), and were met by another very enthusiastic member of staff who gave us a guided tour of the House, explaining how it came into Wellington's possession and pointing out the treasures and pictures it contained.

Once again a very interesting day out organised by Frances & Eric which we are sure was enjoyed by all that went.

(Editor's Note. All those that came had a tale to tell of their journey from Sidcup to the West End in the morning and the four that joined us for Apsley House in the afternoon who also got caught up in a demonstration! By the end of the day which had been quite galling journeywise, we felt we had been indomitable in the face of crisis and after all had quite enjoyed our outing!)

VISIT TO THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY - 18th February 2004 by Frances Percival

About 35 of us were due to visit the Gallery but for various reasons only 27 actually came on the day. Many of us travelled on the same train and entered the Gallery through the first door in St.Martin's Place and went down into the basement for a coffee. Eventually we found our way to the lecture theatre with a few very reliable members missing. THEY, had followed instructions and waited in the main hall but used their initiative and met up with us in the theatre having only missed three or four minutes of the talk. My apologies to them.

The Lecture Theatre was well appointed with good sound and projection systems enabling to view two slides at once. Our lecturer was Mary Connatty who gave as an introductory talk to the Gallery

In my correspondence with the Gallery I said that our area over the last centuries was full of grand estates owned by the nobility and politicians and so quoted some of these personalities. Could we see any of their portraits, please? Yes, Ms Connatty had found three of our local personalities and so we were delighted to see on screen, a very young and handsome portrait of Viscount Castlereagh, the great statesman. The MI5 man of the Elizabethan age, Thomas Walsingham of Scadbury came up and later we saw the familiar drawing of Dame Ethel Smythe. (A real ripple of comment went round the members when this was shown.) I think it illustrates the breath of the NPG collection and the point that if you are working on a study of people or persons you can probably turn up a likeness at the Gallery and feel more familiar with them. Immediately, you have them in their historical setting with their hair and clothes in the fashion of the day.

We had well over an hour in the lecture theatre, viewing many portraits, with Mary telling us of both the sitter and the artist. This inspired some of us after lunch to visit the gallery proper and see in situ many of the portraits we had seen on screen.

Some of the portraits had been used to illustrate our society lectures and no doubt our speakers had purchased the slides at the Gallery.

A good morning was had by all, delving into the past through the medium of art.

We were pleased to have Anne & Keith Brunton with us on their last society outing prior to moving to Northumberland as they had been such stalwarts in the society. Keith of course as our examiner of accounts and we will especially remember Anne for her contribution to the Millennium project.

VISIT TO CROSSNESS - Sunday, March 7th, 2004

by Bess Dzielski

We don't think twice about using the 'loo'. We pull the chain, wash our hands and leave the bathroom rarely giving a thought to any further proceeding. We take it for granted there is a system of disposal which will work automatically. And it does - thanks to a Victorian engineer called Sir Joseph Bazalgette, a man who undoubtedly should wear a halo for his efforts in providing one of the greatest assets of modern life - an efficient sewage system.

Accounts of urban life at the beginning of the nineteenth century are like reading horror novel. Sir John Harrington may be famed for his invention of the flushing toilet in Tudor times but for the 'hoi poloi' of London, residents of the 'Great Wen', life could be footed. Human waste was disposed of into drains which ran into the Thames - which could also be the source of drinking water. In the 1850's very hot weather emphasised what has become known as the 'Great Stink' when lime-soaked sacks had to be hung over the windows of Parliament to alleviate it. And once Members of Parliament were affected things began to happen (just like today!). The equivalent of twenty million pounds was voted for improvements and gave rise to one of the great engineering works. The system organised by Bazalgette a was magnificent achievement built on Erith Marshes, a sewage system which took all the effluent from London, processed it using four beam engines - the largest in the world - and discharged at ebb tide into the sea. The building itself was like an iron cathedral. Very soon cholera disappeared from London. Eventually succeeded by newer engines in 1956 the original site was abandoned and left to decay until a group of enthusiasts decided to return it to its

original splendour with the establishment of what has become The Crossness Engines Trust

SCHOOL REPORTS

INFANTS SCHOOL - 1921 - 1923

by the late Millie Salmon

I remember, the Infant's School I attended in May 1921, the year I was five. (It was bombed during the war in the Blitz on London). I stayed there until I was eight plus in 1924, when I changed schools.

As a newcomer I had to wait in the hall and stand beside the platform of the Headmistress who was called 'Governess' and face the children until she was ready for me. I viewed the assembly with mixed feelings (I wanted to run home to my Grandmother). I watched the pupils peeping through their hands, trying to keep both their eyes closed. The hymns were a mystery. One was "A Friend for Little Children Above the Bright Blue Sky" - I remember wondering if God was on a cloud. Another hymn we sang was "Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep....None Can Pluck Me from Thy Hand". (This hymn meant to me something about dying as I associated it with the plucking of the chickens my Grandmother kept).

The Lord's Prayer was a puzzle - what was 'trespass'? Each and every day the children marched out of the hall to the strains of the 'Marche Militaire'.

We sat at wooden desks to start our lessons, drawing on a slate with a slate pencil. Later we progressed to a small blackboard and a bit of chalk which was kept in a slot at the top of the desk.

Every day we had to stand up and sing our times-tables gradually progressing to our twelve times table. We then had dictation or a spelling test. The winner earned a penny, which was lovely as we could spend it in a nearby tuckshop. Sweets were two ounces for a penny. My rival was Bobby Marshall. He was the caretaker's son and lived in a house in the school grounds but he was often late for school. Those who did not like school were frightened to stay away because the School Board man (who we looked upon as a bogey man) would call at your home and take you away!

For writing, we had to copy letters in copperplate. Top infants could use real ink. An ink monitor - a boy from the 'Big School' mixed the ink from powder, poured it into an enamel jug with a spout, and filled the inkwell that nestled in the hole in our desks. When I changed school I had to forget 'copperplate' writing and changed to 'round hand' writing with a relief nib.

The highlight of the year was May 24th, Empire Day. It was always a sunny day. On a dais sat Britannia, complete with helmet and shield, and draped in the flags of the British Empire. Some girls represented Scotland, complete with Tartan skirts and sashes and danced the 'Keel Row' some represented Ireland, wearing green skirts and kerchiefs on their heads and danced the 'Irish Jig'. But best of all was dancing round the Maypole, holding striped ribbons. The older girls could wear their Brownie uniforms.

At playtimes we played such games as 'Shadows', 'Half a Pint of Porter, Penny on the Can, Hop There and Back Again, See If You Can' and 'Old Pollywitch Fell in a Ditch' and of course the ever popular game of 'He'.

I look back on those days as being the best of my school days!

(I was so pleased that I found Millie's write-up in the file as firstly it is the appropriate newsletter for it and secondly I can identify with her Empire Day memories. Editor)

SCHOOLDAY MEMORIES

by Jean Davis

As I've lived in the same house in Bexleyheath all my life, my schooldays were all in, or on the verge of, the Borough of Bexley. However, it wasn't a Borough when I started school, just an Urban District. In fact, I was among the hundreds of local schoolchildren gathered in Danson Park when the Borough of Bexley received its Charter - heady stuff at the age of about eight and not really understanding what it was all about!

My first steps to school were few as I lived about twenty yards from the Church Road. Infant & Junior Schools. These schools were built in the late 1890's and my grandfather, who was a carpenter, was part of the team that built them. The Junior School is a particularly fine building and has a 'tower' which is a local landmark.

I was not a reluctant starter at school and can remember being amazed at the tears and fears of some of my fellows on our first day. Being an only child I really looked forward to this adventure

Infants School was good for the most part, except for one tyrannical teacher who was subsequently suspended. Junior School was lovely. Looking back, I realise how lucky we were in having several young, newly qualified and exceptional teachers with new ideas, backed up by a dedicated, more mature team.

We had exciting 'art' lessons and I was introduced to various techniques which did not require the genius of a Michaelangelo. Stencil printing on linen is one particular skill I remember. I have no drawing talent, but I was able to do this. We were also taught imaginative embroidery - which wasn't bad at junior level in the 1930's. We also had a pipe band (playing by numbers) with bamboo pipes which we made and painted ourselves.

My time there ended in July 1939 and then came 'The War', I was fortunate enough to have won a scholarship to St. Joseph's Convent in Abbeywood (now part of Bexley College) and spent the war years there. These were unusual times, of course, but strangely very happy ones. The nuns took great care of us and I think the war brought us all very close together, both at school and in our social lives. After all these years, several of our form go to the annual reunion, and in 1989 and 1999 we got most of our class together for a 50 year and 60 year lunch.

This perhaps makes up for the fact that we were at times in great danger - especially going to and coming back from school. I have memories of seeing part of the bombing of Bexleyheath Broadway from the top of a 122 bus which at that time was routed down King Harolds Way and had a magnificent view over the Borough. Also we had to run for cover into the nearest house when 'planes came over during an air-raid. How trusting we were that the residents would welcome us in and do us no harm!

Sadly, we were also deprived of school outings. The only one I can remember was to see "As You Like It" at the Scala Theatre in London with Donald Woolfit and Rosalind Iden who braved the bombs to bring a bit of theatre to the young and enabled us to see performed, our play set for School Certificate.

I hope this reminiscence will stir memories in others and indicate how much I enjoyed my schooldays.

SCHOOL REPORT

By Eric Percival

I have no memories of my first infant school. Apparently I cried all morning on the starting day but was OK after that.

Big School at the age of five was in Akerman Road, Brixton - it was one of the London School Board massive structures with the infant and junior sections separated by a playground. I have vague memories of being made to lie down for an afternoon sleep that was completely unsuccessful because we all talked to one another. This school was also used for practice teaching by the student teachers. This was great fun as taunting student teachers was a popular sport even at that early age. I remember one of them coming back fully qualified and being warmly greeted by the children. It was from here that arrangements were made for the evacuation to the country. The first scheme in the early part of the war was not well supported.

In 1941, I left for destination unknown during the second phase evacuation, and the blitz on London. The destination proved to be Paignton in Devon where two of us were selected by a Welsh couple whose own children were grownup. All those on the train met the following day and were allocated their school. I can clearly remember two of the 'older' boys who must have been about fourteen announcing that 'it was too quiet here - we are off back to London'. My school was to be Polsham Road. Here we embarked on a strange nomadic life, part of the time being spent in the new school, part in the very old one it replaced and partly in a church hall. All the teachers were from London and the books etc. were stamped LCC. Life in Devon was good and very different from south London, we used to collect hazelnuts and blackberries when in season and there was always fields and woods where we could play. The only school outing I can remember was to a pottery in Babbacombe where I bought an ashtray for my Mother (who did not smoke).

By 1943 my Mother had come to Devon and taken a room so I lived with her but as things were getting better in London we returned home and I was back to my starting school. I was now 10. My parents decided to move away from Brixton to a 'safer' area that was Streatham. So I duly went to the nearest education establishment which was St. Leonard's C of E, a fairly small school. Several recollections here, the main hall was heated in winter by a large open fire with a metal guard. No one could get close as the duty teacher always stood by it. The hall faced Mitchell Lane and one day as we were standing in assembly a passing tram went off the rails taking most of the day to right it. I recall that having heard on radio mention of a kilometre and being told that it was five eighths of a mile! Next move was to take the 11 plus exam (it wasn't called that) and being sent to Encham Road secondary school in Tooting Broadway. This was a mixed school and after about a year the boys moved on and went to Balham. The staff organised many out- of- school activities including a drama section. I was selected to play then 'wall' in 'A Midsummer's Night Dream' that was to be performed in County Hall within part of a larger, schools display. We had to get into costume at school so I had to stand all the way as my 'costume' was built like a real wall (my one claim to fame). From this school we went on many visits to theatres and concerts. The concerts that were performed by famous orchestras took place in the Granada cinema. The theatre trips were to a theatre in Camberwell Green. We enjoyed two restoration comedies but did not enjoy a performance of 'Murder in the Cathedral'.

The Sadlers Wells Theatre was the venue for two ballet performances that were enjoyed by me, anyway. Only one cinema show - what else but 'Henry the Fifth'. We listened to

the BBC Schools programme and I particularly remember two broadcasts, the Nuremburg War Crimes trials and the assassination of Gandhi.

The school was organised in two streams, technical, that was woodworking and metal work and commercial which consisted of bookkeeping, shorthand and typing. The latter was the one I chose and at the age of sixteen left to join a pharmaceutical company where I stayed for the next thirty five years.

AN EPISODE FROM MY SCHOOLDAYS

by Dorothy Walker

The following took place in about 1937 at the LCC Wilton Road Junior School in Dalston, Hackney E.8.

I remember clearly the headmistress entering our classroom to choose the pupils who were to take part in the school play. The play was 'King Melon' and was to be performed at the annual carol service. Our parents were to be invited as well as the bigwigs from County Hall.

I was at the back of the class of 48 pupils, knitting and could see little chance of taking part. All the main characters had been cast and nobody was going to notice me right at the back of the class.

I suddenly found myself dropping my steel knitting needles to the ground to attract attention to the back of the class. As I stooped to pick them up, I heard the headmistress say, "Oh, who have we got in the back row? It's Dorothy Langstone".

She had noticed me and I was given a small part as King Melon's mother.

I was dressed in a long gown, with a crown on my head and a pillow tied to my bust, which kept slipping down. I only had two lines to say:

"My dear Melon, you must not exert yourself so much. You know how bad it is for you".

This was my last year at junior school but I had made it to the school play, by hook, crook, or steel knitting needles!!!

FIVE IN 1939 - SCHOOLDAYS IN ILFORD

Olive Mercer, previously Olive Annis, née Olive Scarlett.

I was five in 1939 when the war started. I should have started school that September but children were being evacuated and the local primary school, which had been built in the late thirties, was closed. We lived in Ilford, Essex (I did not come to live in Sidcup until 1967, when I first married and became Olive Annis), and as we were directly north of the docks and the factories on the Thames it seemed likely the Germans would target the area for bombing. My brother Harold was eight and my parents would not be separated from us. My father worked for the Colonial Office in Westminster so that they agreed that my mother should take us to lodge out of London and my father would join us at weekends. Quite a lot of families did this. We had a small car, a Singer Nine, and we loaded up and set off north along the Essex-Hertfordshire border.

It had a biblical feel about it, as we stopped at one modest inn after another and were told they were already full. We finally found a small inn-come-farm in the tiny village of Widford, near Ware. There were chickens in the yard, and a lavatory which consisted of a wooden seat above a bucket in a shed in the orchard, which had a lot of plum trees (of

which more later!) and it seemed quite an adventure to a five-year-old, though the dark staircase to the candlelit bedroom was scary. There was another family lodging there who had the same idea as us: Mrs Clark and her son Norman (inevitably called Nobby, and my brother's age). My father joined us at teatime on Saturday, because most people worked a half-day on Saturday then.

There was no school so we used to go for long walks and play games. This existence naturally did not seem idyllic to my Mother and Mrs Clark. We were all townies and we viewed the fields of cows (was there a bull in there?) askance. The landlady had a fierce temper and a cavalier attitude to domestic hygiene. My Mother hated arguments, but when she saw farmyard eggs (lightly wiped) going into the kettle for boiling before the water was used to make tea, words were exchanged. The landlady's two teenage children were worked hard on the farm, and we London softies no doubt seemed to her to be in need of toughening up. We were fed stewed plums from the orchard daily, and Harold developed a violent rash which the doctor diagnosed as an allergy to stone fruit. Perhaps the deciding factor, I learned later, was that the landlady was carried upstairs every Saturday night shouting drunk. My mother said we might as well be bombed to death at home as be poisoned in the country, and back to Ilford we went after three months.

The schools were still shut, so we joined Home Classes, which were conducted part-time by any teachers available. Our dining room ("A fireguard must be in place") became a classroom for older children in the mornings, but the class for me (I was six by then) was in another house. I remember my mother leaving me there with a "big girl" aged seven, Jeanette, daughter of the house, and being determined not to cry in case Jeanette thought me a baby. We had coloured cards with "A is for apple", and so on. My parents must have taught us what they could, because when I finally went to school aged six and a half I was not behind the other children, though my maths were always a little uncertain, as with all the stop and start of wartime education and childhood illnesses I had less than four years of primary education altogether.

I have seen children's books about life in the thirties and forties which say boys and girls were educated separately and physical punishment was frequent, but this was not my experience or that of contemporaries I have spoken to. In my school and other local primaries boys and girls were taught together and the discipline was firm but benign, as it was at home. Boys were sometimes caned for serious misbehaviour but I never heard of a girl physically punished. There was no school uniform because clothes were rationed by a points system, and it was not feasible for children to have different sets of clothes for home and school.

Lessons stopped and we all went to the sandbagged corridors when the siren sounded, and the schools were periodically shut as the war progressed, and the V1 and V2 rockets added to the problems later on. Plenty of stray bombs, land mines and incendiaries landed locally, just as they did in the Bexley area. I remember standing with my mother at night at the bedroom window, when my father was out firewatching (he was in the Home Guard), seeing houses in nearby roads on fire, and collecting shrapnel on my way to school, passing the houses hanging inside out when they had been whole the day before. There was a patch the shape of Africa on the bedroom ceiling where a hasty repair had replaced the plaster that descended after a local hit, and twice bomb blast knocked the front door lockright down the hall. Towards the end of the war when the V1's and V2's were plummeting from the sky we all slept in the living room in a Morrison shelter (a sort of vast tin box with a grill on one side), my parents in the middle and my brother and me at the sides.

My brother was already at the mixed grammar school when I went on to the girls' grammar school in September 1944, where the cloisters were still sandbagged. The first year had very small classes which grew by the second year when the war ended and evacuated girls returned and took up their places. It was even by the standard of those times old-fashioned when we compared it to other local schools. I wore a gymslip until I was eighteen, hems had to be four inches above the knee (that was 1952, and the New Look had arrived in 1949 with mid-calf skirts). We had to kneel to have our four inches measured and got a detention if we were too long. I was never a rebel, but once got a detention for having a purse not on a string round my shoulders (the strap had come undone) - a serious infringement of dress rules. I enjoyed the academic work and was lucky to have excellent teachers in my three A-level subjects, but some of the teachers presumably taught because there was no other way of making a living. They were almost all 'Miss' and were of the great spinster generation, the young men many of them might have married were killed in the Great War. The Headmistress was a tough woman who shared her house with her fiend the games teacher. I hated games and they didn't like me (or most of their charges, I suspect). They were seldom apart and led the draconian discipline that was hardly necessary in a very Sedcopian middle class area. Not long ago I wrote to an old school friend, "Was it really like that, or is it just me?" and she wrote back, "No, it's not you, that's how it was". It's reassuring to have a witness to your childhood memories.

END OF SCHOOL REPORTS FOR THIS ISSUE

A FEW FACTS ABOUT BLACKFEN LIBRARY, from Bess Dzielski

Blackfen was opened in 1937 and I worked there in June 1941, I'd come home from evacuation when we moved from New Cross to Sidcup, which at that wasn't an evacuation area. But I didn't settle at Chis & Sid Grammar so left school at 16. I applied for a job as a junior library assistant. Due to wartime shortages the reaction was 'You can read, dear? Have a job'. For a salary of £52 per annum, plus wartime addition. My first month's cheque was for four pounds, three shillings and fourpence.

At that time the Sidcup branch of Kent County Library consisted of the Sidcup branch in Hadlow House, where one of the duties of a junior assistant was stoking up the fire at the counter, Chislehurst branch in Redhill, built to virtually the same plans as Blackfen, Mottingham, a part-time shop in the High Street and Blackfen in Cedar Avenue. Miss Joan Conlin was the Branch Librarian, Miss Brookfield the Assistant-in-charge at Chislehurst and Miss Baddock at Blackfen. Other staff at Blackfen were Elizabeth Stuckey who became Librarian at Leatherhead and Monica Webster who went to Petts Wood. After a few months Miss Baddock left and Eileen Herron came from Barnehurst to Blackfen. She(now Mrs Fielder) and I still exchange Christmas Cards. During these years at Blackfen Linda Goodall worked there, Lorna New, Jean Vaughan, Janet Tilley, Vivienne Penney and Glynne Davenport.

Miss Conlin left Sidcup and Lorna Paulin succeeded her. Miss Paulin later became Kent County Deputy, County Librarian of Hertfordshire and the first woman President of the Library Association. She was a joy to work for. She was succeeded by Miss (Marjorie) Granger who became Chief Librarian when Chislehurst and Sidcup contracted out of the County in 1957. She, I feel sure, was known to many Society members.

(I qualified as an Associate of the Library Association and left Kent County Library in 1949 to work as Reference Librarian and subsequently as Chief Cataloguer at the old Metropolitan Borough of Greenwich.)

By 1960 I had got married and had my son and decided to draw in my horns and work locally. When I applied for Branch Librarian, Blackfen it seemed a bit uncertain if I would get the job. It was pointed out that as a Fellow of the Library Association I was over-qualified and taking a cut in salary. But I think I aroused sympathy by mentioning the tribulations of the 108a bus service to Greenwich in the days before the second Blackwall Tunnel was built. This seemed far more effective than qualifications. Anyway, I started back in 1960 and remained in situ until retiring in 1990, for after my son left school my husband became disabled and a local job was invaluable.

In 1960 Winifred Parkinson was the second assistant - she later became Branch Librarian of Mottingham, Gwen Salmon and Jean Ramsey were full-time staff. Later there was Roy Hopper, subsequently librarian of Chislehurst and Mary Orchard whom he married. Pat King was also at one time second assistant, became a Schools librarian and is also on my Christmas List. Eventually we introduced part-timers; one of the most successful was Eileen Kirby who had a natural affinity for children and helped take Storyhours. Moira Banfield was another, Sue Barclay, now gracing Local Studies, Juliet Oliver, now very high in the hierarchy of Bexley Library, Jan Cook, Jan Dawson and others. Second Assistants have included Pat Newman, later Branch Librarian, St. Paul's Cray, Anita Treveil, Liz Gavan, Sue Clapson, Anne Whitehouse (who became an Evangelist and has worked as far afield as Samarkand) and Jackie McGuire.

The building itself has had a varied career. In the early days a Citizens' Advice Bureau was run by Miss Gladys Hammond who for many years was a member of Lamorbey Park, was held in the hall. The Rates Department had it once a week and later the hall was used as a Reserve Stock from which we ran the Music and Play sets. During the war the Stockroom was used as a Wardens' Post, Douglas Fielding was the Chief Warden. Monty Avis and Gladys Wallis were two of the other Wardens. In November 1977, during the Fire Brigade strike, local vandals broke a window and threw in burning material. One corner of the Lending Library was completely burnt out and the rest damaged by smoke. The library was closed for a month and then a temporary service ruin from the Junior Library for about six months.

In the 1980's the counter was removed and the Librarian's office converted into an issuing area; also the Sound Recordings collection was installed.

In 1987 we celebrated the Golden Jubilee and had a great party with many old staff getting together. There has always been much contact with schools; indeed Mr Bowering when Headmaster of Days Lane had a gate made in the school fence so children could get to the library quickly. One summer an enthusiastic member of staff insisted on producing a children's play - an episode I'd much rather forger! It would be quite invidious to mention the occasion when, visiting Hall Place for book viewing session, I was asked to see Mr Barnett in his office. The Chief Librarian had just received a frantic phone call from Blackfen to say that a member of staff had attacked a car belonging to a reader and I was required back there at once. Not every Branch Librarian has to call the police to pursue one of her staff! Who says libraries are dull?

Now Blackfen's future is up for grabs. The powers that be say it will cost £200,000 to repair and want to move it up to Blackfen Road! That it's too quiet and off the beaten track. But it's one of the few libraries in the Borough which isn't surrounded by yellow lines. But how much more will it cost to build another library? And how will people park in a place which has only Safeway and no public car-park? And what parent will

let their child visit the Library alone, crossing roads which carry major through traffic? Let's hope that the active Friends of Blackfen Library succeed in their petition. Otherwise, where's democracy?

SOCIETY MEETING - 24TH SEPTEMBER 2003

by Frances Percival

Harking back to the worst first evening of the Society year that I can ever remember not because of the lecture but the failure of the Centre's various projectors.

Mrs Burgoyne Black our speaker had recently published her book on the life of Hasted and so the content of her talk was on Hasted the person and his family. I thought it might be fitting if I outlined why he was so well known in the County of Kent in the 18th Century.

His work on the history of Kent, its topography, great estates and the armorial bearings of those that possessed them was so detailed that it provides today's historians with ready-made material.

He followed on in the footsteps of those that 1086 provided William the Conqueror - the new Norman King of England - with a detailed listing of the owners of property and livestock. It became known as the Domesday Book. Bix (otherwise Bexley), Ruxley & Footscray are mentioned in that great tomb.

Much later we have Camden's Britannica produced in the 16th century which was a topographical and historical survey of the various counties of England. He travelled the country just after the monasteries had been dissolved and before the Civil War devastation and so his findings are really invaluable. A man of letters of our time, Hugh Trevor-Roper said that when it appeared in 1586 it at once established Camden as a member of the 'European Establishment of Letters'. He was also Clarenceaux, King of Arms. He also has a connection with Bexley Village through Oxford University. Think how many roads there are named Camden or Oxford in the Bexley locality.

Another historian of the same ilk was Lambarde - we remember his book 'Perambulations of Kent' in which he had collated the information from his travelling in the County.

Again, we think of the indomitable Celia Fiennes - a woman ahead of her time - who went about the English & Scottish countryside on her horse. On one of her many journeys in 1712 she travelled through Epsom, Hampton Court & Windsor and Eton. At the end of book 'The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes - 1682-1712 she concludes :- 'From Windsor I went to the ferry and rode in sight of the castle on this side, which is all the King's & Queen's apartments and looks very noble, the walls round with the battlements and gilt balls and other adornments, here I ferry over the Thames and so went a nearer way which is a private road made for the King's coaches and so to Colnbrook, Hence to Hounslow Heath and so to London, here ends my long journey this summer, in which I had but three days of wet except some refreshing showers sometime and I think that was not above four, in all the way, in all, which way and time I desire with thankfulness to own the good providence of God protecting me from all hazard and dangerous accident'.

Daniel Defoe of Robinson Crusoe fame also wrote of his journeys through England & Wales.

Our original subject, Hasted, wrote and received copious correspondence that allowed him to write on Kentish matters. He produced 12 volumes of the History and

Topographical Survey of the County of Kent. For our own area we are interested in Volume 2. On the first page Hasted is writing in great fullness to Viscount Sydney requesting permission to dedicate his book to him. It is addressed to the Rt.Hon.Thomas Lord Viscount Sydney of St.Leonards in Gloucestershire and Baron Sydney of Chesilhurst in the County of Kent, One of the Lords of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council (hence the title of Right Honourable). Here we have our Chislehurst and Sidcup connections.

Now at that time Kent was divided into Lathes and then Hundreds. Our area was part of the Ruxley Hundred which contained the parishes - Chesilhurst in part, Hayes, West Wickham, Keston, Farnborough, Downe, Cowdham, Nockholt, Chelsfield, Orpington, St.Mary Cray, Paul's Cray, Foots Cray, North Cray with Ruxley & Bexley.

One or two snippets from the book:- 'Chesilhurst is one of the most pleasant and healthy parishes among the many that lie within the environs of the Metropolis and has within its bounds, numbers of elegant villas with gardens and plantations beautifully disposed. These are dispersed throughout the village, and round the common, generally inhabited by persons of fortune and distinction. The Village, with the Church and Parsonage stand adjoining the south side of the Common which is nearly in the centre of the parish. Farther eastward is Place Green and beyond Scadbury and the Mansion of Frognaal. The Manor of Scadbury was a place of some note in former times. Many generations of de Scadbury owned it and the last one died without male issue and so his daughter carried it in marriage to the Walsinghams. A famous Walsingham was Sir Francis who was Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth the First. He often entertained Christopher Marlowe. The estate passed through several hands until we hear of the Hon.Thomas Townshend whose son was created Lord Viscount Sydney. The name of this family was used as the name of one of the great Australian cities.

A lovely piece on Camden. 'Camden Place is a seat which stands on the west side of Chesilhurst Common and took its name from its owner, the great and learned William Camden one of the most learned writers, diligent antiquaries, and impartial historians, that his own age or this country has produced. In 1597 he was created Clarenceaux, King at Arms. He retired to Camden Place in 1609 and finding himself gradually declining with infirmities and old age, he no longer delayed his intention of founding the 'History Lecture at Oxford' but sent the gift of it to that University in May, 1622. He died soon after at the age of 73'. Eventually Oxford University held for many centuries much of the land around Bexley Village.

Foots Cray is mentioned - taking its name from Godwin Fot the owner in Saxon times. 'There is a small street of houses built on each side of the road that forms the village of Foots Cray - the river Cray crosses that road and turns by a mill and directs its course towards North Cray. Foots Cray Park almost adjoins the village, on the north side of it, near which the church stands. Hence the ground rises westward toward Sidcup, at about half a mile distance from whence towards the western bounds of this parish, it is very dreary and unpleasant and much covered with coppice wood and the soil is very poor, being much of it either gravel or infertile clay. Unlike North Cray which is exceedingly pleasant and healthy being situated on gravelly soil and in a well frequented neighbourhood. The high road from The Crays which may be styled the Garden of this part of Kent and Orpington to Bexley passes through North Cray in which is a neat seat called Wollett Hall. The Cray at this point passes the gardens of not only Wollett Hall but North Cray Place and Vale Mascall at which this last it forms a beautiful cascade and flows on to Bexley.

Lastly, Lamienby now corrupted as Lamaby is a seat in the parish of Bexley. Situated about 2 miles from Bexley Church between the hamlets of Hurst and Halfway Street. It once belonged to an ancient family named Sparrow and the last of the line was Thomas Sparrow who died in 1513 and was buried in Bexley Church. His daughter, Agnes was his sole heir who carried the seat in marriage to James Goldwell. It continued in the possession of the Goldwells for some generations when it passed by sale to William Steele who rebuilt the house and laid the ground around it into a park'. We then have the Dingleys mentioned and eventually David Orme, the ancestor of the Malcolm family who in the 20th century were still well known in Lamorbey.

So, if you want the history of the area up to the 1790's, Hasted is your man. He not only asked for information from all over the County but as the people I have mentioned previously, he also travelled the County so that he actually witnessed the scenes he was writing about.

THE CLASS OF '56!!!!!!

By Judith Hobbs

'Is that Judith?' asked the voice from the past, when I answered the phone in September. The voice belonged to an old school chum whom I had not seen for over 42 years. There was to be reunion of all the girls who started at Camborne County Grammar School for Girls, Cornwall in September 1956. Fortunately it was going to be half term when I would be in Cornwall visiting my Mother.

So on Wednesday, 29th October, 2003 I put on my glad rags and picked up my friend Helen (whom I had not seen for 28 years) and we drove from Redruth (where I was born) to the Lowennac Hotel at Camborne.

As we entered the hotel foyer we could hear them chattering away in the function room!! About 36 of us, out of a possible 60, gathered to reminisce. We exclaimed with delight as we recognised one another. Everyone looked fantastic!!!

The guest of honour was our French mistress, still living locally and now 92. Her face radiated happiness as she shared memories with her girls. She delighted us by making a speech in honour of the occasion, lapsing occasionally into French.

We came from far and near. Some girls had stayed in Cornwall, while many had left and returned to live there more recently. We had come from as far as Canada, Lincolnshire, London, Kent, Surrey, Somerset, Hampshire and Devon. Between us we had many husbands (and ex-husbands) collecting children and grandchildren along the way.

Our Careers were diverse and including teaching, nursing, physiotherapy, all types of office work and working in the National Theatre. We even boasted an Ofsted Inspector and a truck driver who drives articulated lorries in America.

We passed around old photos - was it really 45 years ago? A delicious buffet was served which included mini Cornish pasties. The reporter from the 'West Britain' appeared and patiently tried to stop us talking long enough to take a group photo.

As the evening drew to a close we said our goodbyes and exchanged e-mail addresses and phone numbers. We vowed to all meet up again in two year's time when we are 60!

(This article fits in so well with those when members have reminisced on their schooldays over the various decades of the 20th century. Editor)

OBITUARIES

MILLIE SALMON

Millie had been a pillar of our society way back into Mr Nunn's time together with her husband Bill. Poor Bill came to our meetings as he was needed to chauffeur Millie. They always sat in the front row on the right and it was only of recent years that Millie suffered from stokes and suffered from desperately making herself understood. After a while her speech was clearer. In the early part of 2003, Bill rang to say that Millie had died in Queen Mary's Hospital. She left instructions in her will that after her death her body was to be given to Queen Mary's Hospital to aid scientific research. This meant that there was no funeral service at the time of her death and we were unable to say goodbye to her. I understood from Bill that much later on the family had a private memorial service.

JOAN FARRELL

A tribute from Janet Woods

On hearing of Joan's death, a number of society members asked to see a photograph of her as they could not quite put a face to a name. This would not have worried Joan in the slightest. She liked to keep a 'low profile' as they say, and yet she was very supportive and contributed to every group that she belonged. She would not have given a vote of thanks or asked a question, but she would quite happily make tea, wash up, take money, tick people off lists or do any other backroom sorting out job that was required. There was a very large congregation at the funeral : as well as her relatives, a group of long standing friends and neighbours. Also representatives from Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society, Erith & Belvedere Local History, Bexley Civic Society, Friends of the Red House, the 'Old Girls' of St. Joseph's Convent, the Save the Children Fund Charity Shop, colleagues from her former employment and of course members of the congregation from St. John Vianney.

Although we lived quite close to each other, I did not get to know Joan until she joined the Society in about 1990 when we were still at Lamorbey House. She joined with her close friend, Jean Davis. Jean and Joan had known each other since they were eleven and first attended St. Joseph's Convent on Bostall Heath. To many of us they were Jean & Joan - an inseparable pair - and this must have been of great annoyance to both of them as they both led very independent lives. They did a great deal together but when they were young women with their own social and work lives to pursue, they mostly knew of each other's doings by the joint friendship of their mothers. But nevertheless as they settled into retirement they were Jean and Joan to most of us, and they accepted it with good grace.

When you get to know someone in retirement, it gives great pleasure to be surprised from time to time. During general chat over the years, I learned that Joan had been a keen and skilled fencer advancing through the various stages to a high standard of qualification and then becoming a teacher of that skill. She had attended fencing classes at Brampton Road Adult Education Centre and was one of the first intake of students. Once when we were talking about Danson Park she mentioned that she used to judge



JOAN FARRELL

cycle racing at the Sports Days there, so she must have been a very competent racing cyclist. Many of her happiest memories covered the time when she was engaged to a senior sports journalist (who sadly died before they could marry). She often spoke of her fiancé and of her experiences sitting in the press gallery during major football matches (including the Cup Final), at major horse races (including the Derby) and at Wimbledon.

Joan was a 'lady' in every sense of the word. She was very feminine: she loved clothes, make-up, jewellery and always looked lovely. Yet she had no hint of vanity or self regard. She was kind, gentle and considerate.

For the last four months of her life Joan knew that she was dying. She did suffer acute pain at times, but fortunately with modern treatments this abated for certain periods enabling her to go out for meals with friends and attend church. No one can know the inner thoughts of someone at this time, but it was a pleasure to visit Joan during those last weeks of her life. She was the same Joan. Interested in and solicitous of others. She is missed by all her friends and will always be remembered.

PHYLLIS PARKER

A few words from Mary Boorman

'Having had the pleasure of knowing Phyllis for many years I always admired the interest she took in many things. Packing her sandwiches and going to watch cricket at Lords and tennis at Wimbledon, even standing in the pouring rain to watch the tall ships, the last time they came up the river, visiting museums and art galleries.

Another of her activities I shared with her many and her friends was modern sequence dancing at which she was very good. She also enjoyed our Easter and Halloween parties and joined in all the fun. I shall miss her'

(Those of you who still have the Autumn 2001, Newsletter will find on Page 14, Bess Dzielski's article on Phyllis. It was No.1 article in the 'Getting to Know You' series which really charts her life).

Phyllis died in Queen Mary's Hospital on Christmas Day, 2003 in her 90th decade. Several of us attended her funeral service at Holy Trinity, Lamorbey where she had been a worshipper all her life. The hymns we sang were of her choosing - how peaceful she must have been within herself to give thought to her funeral. Echoing Mary's thoughts we shall all miss her!

Editor

A TRIBUTE TO DR. JOHN SEYMOUR

given by John Mercer at Eltham Crematorium, 29th January 2004

I suppose I had known John for more than 30 years, but only in his last years have I got to know him as more than a passing acquaintance. He would come to the 8 o'clock service at St. John's at least once a month. He much preferred the traditional language of the Book of Common Prayer. We met him with his wife, Joan, on holiday at Southwold on more than one occasion. It was a place they loved and stayed there often. Before my time as a lay reader at St. John's, John Seymour had taken a prominent part in the life of the church. In the days of Canon Webb he had been a server and member of the choir. He was also a founder member of St. John's Operatic Society. His mother,

Dorothy, was a pillar of the church, too, and related to Canon Spurgin, who was the vicar of St. John's for over 30 years.

John was born in Ceylon, his father and his grandfather being tea agents. But because of his poor health the family returned to England soon after his birth in 1927. The family home was in Priestlands Park Road, and from there John travelled to Eltham College for his education. Disaster struck the family in 1944, when a V2 rocket exploded in the garden and killed his father who was gardening. After leaving school John served two years in the RAF on National Service and then went to London University to read Physics and Electronics. After graduation he worked briefly at KB in Foots Cray and then became a lecturer at the Woolwich Polytechnic. He diligently acquired an MSc and also a wife. He and Joan were married in 1953, the Coronation year. They celebrated their golden wedding last year. John was an academic. He went on to obtain a doctorate in acoustics and reached the position of principal lecturer at the Polytechnic. But his interests were not limited to the sciences. He was musical. He played the piano and was an organist. As an organist he played for Masonic occasions at the Faraday Lodge in London. He belonged to several learned societies and was a genealogist. His research into the Seymour family in Bridport has become a reference work and he was the author of several books on physics published by Longmans. He loved art and with Joan he visited the art galleries of London and elsewhere. This is his family and scholastic history, what of John as a man? He was a true gentleman, unassuming, likeable. He got on easily with everyone he met. No one had a bad word for him. He was a gentle man. He bore his illness of four years with fortitude and with never a complaint. He would have been 77 next November. We thank God for his life and his witness to God and to man. We mourn for his going but take heart from his gentle example. We feel for Joan and his brother, Peter in their loss. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

LORD WALLACE OF COSLANY 1906 - 2003

We record the passing in November, 2003 of George Wallace who not a member of the Society but was a bastion of care for local residents. In the Lamorbey area particularly we remember him for the grass verges that he was determined should be part of our streets. He was associated with Queen Mary's Hospital and especially the building of the hospital we know today. Lord Wallace first went to the House of Commons as the MP for Coslany a district of Nottingham. He later became a life peer hence his title of Lord Wallace of Coslany. He lived for many years in Shuttle Close, Lamorbey and travelled up to the House of Lords from Sidcup. In his parliamentary career he was one those that did make a difference to his constituents.

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