

Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2007

LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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All the articles in this Newsletter have been written by members of the Society, with the exception of "Memories of Old Sidcup" by Mrs Barbara Sharp, a member of the congregation of Holy Redeemer Church, Lamorbey.

Meetings take place at St. Lawrence's Community Centre on selected Tuesdays throughout the Autumn, Winter, Spring & early Summer.
For further details please contact our Secretary Liz Ellicott on 020 8302 7820



Presentation in December 2006 by our new Secretary Liz Ellicott to her predecessor Frances Percival on the occasion of her retirement after 27 years in office

EDITORIAL by Frances Percival

This 2007 newsletter is a bumper one as most of its articles had been kept in deep freeze for future use. They have now been defrosted and none the worse for wear except perhaps for a small tweak here and there.

I usually do all the work necessary in producing the newsletter but on this occasion as I am still experiencing twinges in my wrist due to fracturing it last September Janette and Dave Cunliffe have typed the bulk of it. For this kind action the Society and myself are very much in their debt.

There is a good mix of articles with selections from the "Getting to Know You" series and "Further School Reminiscences" of which there are still more to be used! The Outside Activities/Visits section highlights the life of the Society in Kent, Suffolk and London etc. illustrating that we are active outside Sidcup.

It is pleasing that some local history articles are also included in particular on the Halfway Street, Days Lane area. The hamlet of Halfway Street is marked quite conspicuously on maps of earlier centuries. I am grateful that Mrs Barbara Sharp allowed me to use her articles that were initially printed in the Holy Redeemer Church Magazine. They make very good reading of people in the first quarter of the last century in our locality, sitting on cross-barred gates and walking across the fields to school. Suburbia then marched into this part of Kent at a terrifying speed leaving in its wake the parting from that County becoming part of Greater London. Here and there, there are reminders of the old days such as the old farmhouse in Days Lane, opposite Corbylands. And as Bess says in her article, the ring that at certain times of the year appears on the lawn of the Holy Redeemer Church showing the footprint of the 'Old Tin Church. Eric and I live in Valliers Wood Road, which was the site of the Valliers Wood, which again if you look at some earlier maps was a large one – it was first built on in the 1920's. A long time resident whose family purchased their house when first up for sale told us that in the early years people living on the estate were very close-knit. This is not so apparent today.

For myself, time has elapsed with the need to move on and as you know I have retired from the Secretaryship of the Society but have retained the tasks of committed Outings Secretary and Editor of the Newsletter. Liz Ellicott has already made her mark as the new Secretary and I wish her well in the years ahead. I have left the post knowing that the Society has fared well during my stewardship with membership rocketing since the Lamorbey days and well thought of in the Local History World. I think those that began the Society in 1952 would be proud of it 56/57 years on. In the next newsletter I shall write an article on the history of the Society.

OBITUARIES by Frances Percival

Mrs Mary Boorman died on the 2nd May 2005. She was a long-standing member of the Society as she often took great pleasure in reminding me that she and Iris Morris (later to become Chairman and also Iris Heddle) sat next to each other on their very first attendance in the middle to late 1970's. Mary was a very loyal Society member, always part of the outings and again always ready to give a hand at meetings. I particularly remember her kindness towards her friends Philip and Phyllis Nash (an earlier Outings Secretary) during the last part of their lives.

Leslie Allen. Leslie the beloved husband of Valerie died in November last year having been ill but nevertheless died unexpectedly in his sleep. We all became fond of Les not because he was Val's husband but for himself; the quiet gentleman that attended meetings and outings – joining the walkabouts even though on most occasions he brought up the rear as he coped with the residue of contracting polio in earlier life.

We miss both of these members who were part of the backbone of the Society. Eric & I represented the Society at both funerals when we learnt so much more about them from the family eulogies.

Getting to Know You Series

Pam Miles

by Bess Dzielski

Pam Miles is a comparative newcomer to the Society having been a member for about 6 years, but already she has made her mark by arranging a trip to the Thames Tunnel for us. And in view of her list of interests and activities, I suspect more will follow. Indeed, a trip to the Whitechapel Bell Foundry is already in the pipeline.

A Blackfen girl, product of Westwood Schools and Bexley Grammar she says: 'I worked in the accounts office of a printing company eventually liking the company so much that I bought it' (there's a story in there which could do with unfolding – reminiscent of the chap who bought the razor company!) and was the Company Secretary and Finance Director until 2001, when my business partner retired to the Lake District and we sold it on'. Pam now works in town for Lloyds Insurance Syndicate.

Travel is her hobby and I can't even think of listing the fifty-six countries she says she has visited, or how she finds time to also visit most parts of the United Kingdom. Architecture interests her, cathedrals, churches and buildings, so obviously she is a member of the National Trust and English Heritage. And to visit, as she says, at least ten properties each Open House weekend means she must be a very early riser! But the load of travel is shared by two friends, so she doesn't have to do her own driving. In between whiles she watches telly, reads, plays tennis, watches cricket and as part of a local rambling group walks eight or twelve miles every Sunday.

Margaret and Derek Sharp

by Bess Dzielski

Well, you know the old adage – 'If you want a job done, ask a busy person!' and no one fits that better than Margaret Sharp. But Margaret also comes as one of a pair, and although Derek may not chat quite as much as his wife he certainly pulls his weight in the team. And it's a team which is involved with – wait for it – the Lamorbey Residents' Association, Sidcup Operatic Society, the Women's Institute, the Probus Club of Sidcup, the wine Approval Group in Sidcup and the United Services Club. And, of course, Us – the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society!!!

When arrangements were being made to organise our move from Alma Road to St Lawrence's Hall it just seemed to happen that Margaret took charge of the catering for the tea interval, which now gives us greater opportunities for socialising than before when we had to go out and queue at the canteen.

Before they were in Sidcup, home was in Dorchester Avenue, Bexley, commuting to London for work, but even then they had irons in the fire with badminton and evening classes. And with all they do, one wonders if they have any time to spend at home in Burnt Oak Lane?

As I started ...ask a busy person!

Marion and Maurice Hearn

by Bess Dzielski

Goodness, I thought, seeing the closely typed pages from Marion, don't they do a lot! But by the time I reached the end I realised that this was not just one account but actually three. For Marion and Maurice both it is a second marriage – a coming together of people who had already had full and happy lives broken by death and who eventually began a new relationship.

Marion was a Sidcup girl from Annandale Road, a Days Lane pupil, then Alma Road, the Technical School and Coopers. Her working career in town wasn't all that long for she married at nineteen and was the mother of a daughter at twenty, living with husband Ken in Woolwich. While living in Plumstead their second daughter was born, and she now has a granddaughter. Marion worked for the National Health Service at St Nicholas Hospital Plumstead commonly known as St Nick's, then at Queen Mary's when they moved to Glyn Drive. Ken took early retirement and started his own business, but illness threatened and they made the best of their time with two round the world trips before he died in 1992. As a widow Marion had to find new interests and our Society became one of them.

Maurice had been a passing acquaintance for sometime before their marriage in 1999. His father being a marine, Maurice was born and educated in Portsmouth but being bombed out during the war and evacuated, his education included time at Chichester High. Football was his great sport, something which continued well into adult life. National Service in 1949 took him into the RAF and, after demob, to the Metropolitan Police from where he retired as Inspector. (not the only policeman we have!) His wife Mary was a Nursing Sister at Lewisham Hospital and he has two sons, one of whom has been ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, and he has two grandsons. But Mary died only a few months after his retirement in 1984.

In the course of time they were introduced to each other through a mutual friend and started a new phase of life together being married in St Lawrence's Church, Sidcup where Maurice sings in the choir.

Among their fresh interests they speak very warmly of their membership of the Society.

Further School Reminiscences

From Essex via Worcestershire to S.E. London

by Dorothy Down

My schooldays began just before my fifth birthday, at Little Clacton Council School (Essex).

There were three classes only, with three teachers who seemed to teach every subject. The Head Master, a Mr Edwin Cox, came from Derbyshire and taught us during lovely singing lessons "The Derby Ram". He warned us that if we started smoking cigarettes, by the time we died, we would have burned enough money to have bought a house!!

I was one of the five children chosen to sit for the Scholarship exam, and was one of three who were successful. Consequently, I went to Clacton High School, resplendent with a super new uniform (at tremendous cost) in Sept 1939 – the outbreak of World War 2.

Things went fairly well, although the Authorities, in their wisdom, evacuated children from London. We received senior boys from the Latymer's School in Edmonton. We went to school in the morning and the boys after lunch. This continued until June 1940, when the notorious Lord Haw-Haw broadcast from Germany that he knew that Clacton was hiding it's big guns behind the children. As a result, Latymer were moved out one Sunday, and we were evacuated the next!

Destination unknown, we met in the school grounds and 'crocodiled' to the railway station. We had to wear winter uniform, take a small amount of clothes, the ubiquitous gas mask and a carrier bag of rations. After a long, hot, train journey we ended up in a Worcestershire village on the River Severn – Arley.

My friend and I were taken home, given a cup of milky cocoa full of horrible skin, and put to bed by candlelight. We cried ourselves to sleep with exhaustion. This time we went to school in the afternoon and the village children in the morning. Tuition was a bit haphazard, academically speaking. But we learned a great deal about living in the country, harvesting, potato picking, birth, death, slaughter of animals and the dangers of flooding. The Severn came into the cellar of the house, the pig sties etc. Very frightening at the time.

My parents had, by this time, moved up to Grandma's in Dulwich, away from possible invasion, but not much was happening and eventually the evacuees began to trickle back home. I went too, and was accepted into Sydenham Secondary School and things were fairly normal until a doodle-bug dropped into the hockey field. Our form then went to Sydenham County High. We had the use of an attic. Just chairs around a large table in the centre of the room. When the rocket attacks began, our instructions were to get under the table for protection. This was useless, as we hadn't room to move and anyway by the time rockets exploded, you were either safe – or not! There was no warning.

And so formal education ended. Work, marriage and family followed and then Education began again at Lamorbey Park comprising:-

A History of Women
Archeology, Sumaria, Greece, Romans, Egyptians
and now Local History!!!

Schooldays Remembered

by Marie Brittain

In the mid 1930's I lived with my Gran, who lived just across the road from the school where I started my education. It was like a country school although it was in Camberwell and was a single storey building which had close connections with the Church, just up the road, who had founded it about 1826.

My earliest recollections are having to have a rest on a fold-up bed in the afternoon which they provided for us. The daily dose of cod-liver oil and malt, which we were given on a wooden spatula every morning, followed by a small bottle of milk with a straw. How awful it was in warm weather as there was no refrigeration in those days. We learned to sit with our arms folded and not to fidget.

We had small trays which contained a layer of sand and used our our fingers to draw letters and numbers. The trays could be shaken and re-used until we were proficient, then we were given small exercise books with lines and used a pencil to write. I can't remember much about lessons, but remember a short verse which I liked. It went as follows:

“It's rather dark in the earth today”,
said one little bulb to the other,
so they struggled and toiled through day and night,
until two little snowdrops in green and white,
came out of the darkness and into the light,
and softly kissed one another.

We also learned to knit a small doll's jumper, which involved casting on, increasing and decreasing, then casting off. We also made things with raffia.

On Remembrance Day at 11:00am we had to stop our lessons and stand to attention for the two minutes silence. On the Coronation of the King and Queen, we were given a china beaker which had their picture on it, as well as an orange.

When war broke out, a lot of the children were evacuated from our school, so our school closed and those of us who remained at home were sent to a larger school a short distance away. When the bombing started I did not go to school for some time, then finally I was evacuated with a Convent School from Southwark to Northampton. When the bombing eased a little the lady I stayed with was expecting a baby, so I returned to the school in Southwark, where our lessons were at times disturbed by air raid warnings and we had to go to the air raid shelter with our dictionaries. When the buzz bombs and rockets started I returned to the convent at Northampton, but my education was badly disrupted especially my maths as I never was taught how to do decimals and fractions (one school had not yet covered, or the other was far advanced). My history also suffered as both convents always seemed to be going over the dissolution of the monasteries and Henry VIII. I enjoyed geography, english, science, needlework and domestic science.

I finished my education at a Technical College gaining a diploma in Fine Arts and Modern Embroidery.

I attended Woolwich College for a course around 1973/4 and gained certificates for Business Studies and Audio and Typewriting. Both were RSA with good grades.

Co-Ed Schools 1935-46

by Vera Wilmott

My earliest memory of schooldays go back to the infant school. This was Brecknock School for Boys and Girls Infants and, in the same building, the Juniors. The playground for junior girls was on the flat roof with a barrier all around. The school was three storeys high, so perhaps this is where my fear of heights began.

I started School at five years old. The teacher's name was Miss Cork, who turns up later into my life. She wanted someone to sing a solo verse in the nativity play "Good King Wenceslas" I got the part.

The school was in York Way, Holloway N7 on a direct road to Holloway and Pentonville prisons and also the Caledonian Road Market.

My father was working in a cafe at the time belonging to his sister and brother-in-law who owned it. During our early years, we lived above the cafe. Ex convicts were given money on their release to get a "cuppa" and toast. Also we had policemen (off duty), and barrow boys from the market frequented the cafe for their breakfasts. We, as youngsters, were kept well away. Or so our parents thought, but we often sneaked into the cafe and were made a fuss of being twins (not so many around in those days as today).

In 1939 my twin sister and I were evacuated with the school. We went by train from Kings Cross station to Cambridge. From Cambridge station, the billeting officer allocated which bus you went on. As June and I wanted to stay together, like our parents told us, we moved hand in hand further back away from the others so as to be sure we always were together. Finally, we were put into an Austin 7 driven by a vicar. The car was full of oily rags and petrol smells, so the vicar must have been a keen car mechanic. He drove what seemed to us for hours, eventually landing up at a very small village (8 houses and one bungalow). We stopped at the bungalow. This was Shingay in Hertfordshire.

Our school was a three mile walk from here. The school room was a disused school re-opened for the local village children along with the evacuees. I've no idea where the local children went to school prior to the evacuees arriving, but we outnumbered the locals.

The school consisted of one large school room only. Outside toilets – one only for boys – one only for the girls. The room where we took all our lessons had an open fire, with no fire guard around, which was always alight. About 40 children and one teacher, Miss Cork our infants teacher from York Way.

The open fire didn't seem to be too much of a hazard for us, until lunch time that is for Miss Cork. We were all allowed to take a potato to school as part of our lunch. These were placed in the ashes underneath the fire. By dinner time they were cooked and the scramble to find your own potato, trying to remember which one was yours, began. It was amazing we had no accidents.

June and I had to return to Brecknock School, London owing to our 'carer' having been taken into Cambridge hospital with diabetes. She asked our parents to have us back until she came home. Needless to say, mother wouldn't let us go once she had us back in the fold again. Understandable now as an adult, but we were both upset.

The Blitz soon started and our school together with our house was bombed and after three attempts at us, we finally had to abandon and went to live with my mother's brother and his family in Borehamwood Hertfordshire.

The school I most remember here was the senior school for 11-14 year olds, Hillside School in Hillside Road. The school building was very modern compared to what we had been used to. Two storeys and at the far end a flat had been built on; a large self contained flat. Why? All teachers had to do firewatching duties overnight on a rota basis. Hence the two bedroom flat with dining/kitchen area and bathroom.

Girls in the upper classes had domestic science all day lessons. The morning was taken up with baking and bookwork. After lunch, cleaning, polishing, making beds and laying table etc. Good practice for married life we were told, but we all enjoyed playing house.

There was a large gym hall with apparatus and wall bars etc. Also a large assembly hall with stage. Our music teacher, Miss Durbur used to make up and produce little song & dance routines, sketches and nativity plays all year round. After school hours we would all get together with Miss Durbur and rehearse to put on shows for parents and the public at a nominal fee which we donated to the Red Cross.

Also our P.E. Teachers, Mr O'Kief and Miss Wright along with Miss Durbur ran dancing lessons after school. Ballroom dancing. This was great fun.

Most of the girls, including me, had a crush on Mr O'Kief until one day our Headmaster announced in assembly that Mr O'Kief had yet again become a father for the fourth time around. Many of us were upset. I think we felt we all had a chance till then. Who says things are different today with the 12-14 year old girls?

Upon reaching the age of 14 and due to leave school, we had the option to stay on for a commercial class that had started up in the school run by Miss Cuoni. June and I did, learning telephone etiquette, shorthand typewriting and basic book-keeping. We took Pitmans and London Chamber of Commerce examinations, so helping us to enter the "working world" in the City, where I finally became a secretary and met my husband.

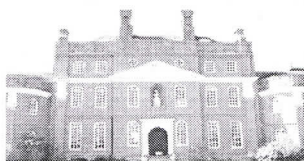
These are very happy memories in spite of our wartime education being disrupted by air raids and having to go to the shelters (learning to play chess with Mr O'Kief was a bonus). A lot of learning time lost, but I've got by.

Outside Activities/Visits

Finchcocks Visit - Music, Churches and Wine

by Bess Dzielski

On the 3rd April 2005 the sun was shining brightly – well, it always does on the righteous, doesn't it – and did so throughout the day! So it was a delightful drive down to Finchcocks for a day which I thought might prove to be slightly less energetic than some that the Society comes up with. And so it proved. On arrival at the lovely Georgian house situated in the high Weald of Kent, a good drive off the A21 and with superb views of farm land, sheep and hop fields the first thing we did was to sit down to have coffee. The restaurant was in a basement restored and decorated with stained glass.



Katrina and Richard Burnett have established in their attractive house – which she described as 'either a small, large house or a large, small house' – a wonderful collection of over 100 historical keyboard instruments, organs, virginals, harpsichords, clavichords and early pianos. In a wood paneled room Richard Burnett, undoubtedly a 'character' and an entertaining and knowledgeable enthusiast, not only described the instruments and their history but demonstrated their capabilities with great skill. Snatches of Purcell were played on one the like of which Pepys purchased for £5. Lillibulero was played on one with a double keyboard; there was music by Thomas Arne, part of a sonata by Cimarosa and the use of one with six loud and soft pedals to imitate percussion nearly scared the wits out of us. A young girl cellist, Nicola, performed a duet with Robert. But the most popular item was an early Barrel Organ! This had the great advantage of showing just how music was actually played nearly 200 years ago and we enjoyed a vigorous version of the National Anthem.

Then back downstairs for an excellent lunch - the Finchcocks Platter - after which some more energetic souls did a tour of the house, while I sat and gazed at the shining vista of Kent and others explored the grounds, which have won a Gold Award from the Kent High Weald Project.

Back in the coach to Goudhurst; again the energetic lot tripped into the church and I put my feet up in the coach. Thus refreshed I was able to perform the feat of descending at the door of Christchurch, Kilndown. Built as a chapel of rest to Goudhurst in 1841 its connection with the Bedgebury estate led to its being restored in the Gothic style; but it suffered in the Second World War. It contains a wealth of fine woodwork, and apart from a pulpit which only the most energetic of clergy could reach and a moustached St George, the most impressive sight were the marquetry panels encountered on entering the church. Made from local wood on the estate they were first presented to Trinity College, Cambridge, but were removed to make room for a war memorial. But 30 years ago a local historian traced them and the college generously returned them to Kilndown. Then back to the coach to sit down – again – for a cream tea at the Lamberhurst Vineyard.

Then the journey home – always a pleasant thing when someone else is doing the driving West into the setting sun! What a pleasant, if somewhat energetic day! Thank you all for the organisation, the company and the conversation.

Visit to Woolwich

by Janet Purkis

With fond memories of Woolwich, I was last there in 1960, I joined 25 other members on a visit to the area on Wednesday 25th May 2005. The tour was led by Mary Corr, who had previously lectured to the Society on Woolwich.

We started at the Town Hall in Wellington Street, a building that was developed in 1903. The entrance and vestibule are lovely and for those of you present at the talk about Woolwich, I can confirm that the statue of Victoria was exactly as the slide. Whilst sitting in the chamber room, one could not but admire the stained glass windows of Henry VIII, the developer of Woolwich and that of his daughter, Elizabeth. Further stained glass could be seen around the top of the vestibule showing the history of Woolwich, and in the committee rooms.

Leaving the town hall, we made our way to Woolwich Arsenal to see the old building and the layout of the 18th and 19th century workings. Definitely worth a further visit.

Across Gordon Square, the statue I remember of Gordon has gone, and up past the last barracks to the Military Academy to meet Major Bowen for our tour. What magnificent silverware with some lovely pieces that are still used today. Visiting the dining room with its polished table, silverware and beautiful chandeliers, one could imagine dining there in military splendour.

Unfortunately our visit had to end but it was an afternoon we will all remember and as one member said "you tend to forget the good things on your own doorstep"

Kentwell, Suffolk

by Mary Webb

Sunday July 3rd 2005 dawned bright and sunny for our coach trip to Kentwell Hall near Long Melford in Suffolk. It was an easy coach journey and we made good time allowing us to be near the head of the queue to go in at 11am.

It was a complete step-back in time as we went through the 'time tunnel' and were then back in 1569. In each room or at an outside site there were residents or workers all in costume. They maintained an 'olde English' conversation throughout, even asking questions about modern contraptions. It certainly gave one the feeling of being back in time and an insight into the conditions that those people endured.

The grounds were very pleasant and allowed plenty of exercise and the weather remained fine although rather gloomy. After leaving at 5pm we had a very good journey home.

Other Summer 2005 Walks/Visits included

Thames Tunnel & St Mary's Rotherhithe 21st May 2005 led by Pam Miles

Footscray Meadows walk 7th June 2005 led by John Charles

Orpington Priory Gardens and Beyond walk 19th June 2005 led by Dave & Janette Cunliffe

Sidcup to Chislehurst walk 28th June 2005 led by Roy Hopper

Our thanks to all concerned for organising these well attended events.

Danson – Rescued, Restored, Rejuvenated

by Bess Dzielski

Rain doesn't stop us! On the 12th October 2005, it began to drizzle as we made our way from the car park; increased while we were in the house and drenched us on the way out. But it didn't spoil the pleasure of the visit for one moment.

And the great pleasure, of course, was to see the magnificent restoration of a building which at one time seemed set for destruction. Over many years it had degenerated from being an impressive eighteenth century Palladian villa through various owners until, under the ownership of the old Bexley Council, its only use had been as a little tea-room and it became so dangerous it had to be cordoned off. But local agitation which had first saved the Stables eventually succeeded and now it stands there proudly and pristine, the result of a ten year restoration with the badge of a Restoration Award winner – the result of some millions spent by English Heritage.

There is no need to recapitulate its history which is well-known not only to local history buffs but it's worth reflecting on the narrow escape it had at the hands of a so-called 'restorer' who almost succeeded in making off with a fortune. But it's now the central glory dominating Danson Park and combining with Hall Place and Red House to offer a cultural experience locally that few would have thought possible a generation ago.

To tour the inside of Danson House now is to look at the renovations so fresh, so glossy, so museum-like that to hope almost that a couple of years or so will dull it down just a little. It looks almost too good to be true.

Our guide took us first to the stone-floored Entrance Hall and suggested that we gaze upward through the marble spiral staircase to the dome; a staircase completely unsupported except by one wall and up which we made our careful way. The Dining Room full of plaster-work and gilding, has a set of contemporary wall-paintings and a magnificent marble fireplace. The red, floral carpet of a contemporary design had to be woven abroad as there is now no loom in England large enough on which to weave it.

In the Salon – the ladies' retiring room – a picture shows the Boyd family, the owners, and the Library, with plaster reliefs and elaborate gilding, and with shelves seeming to contain antique volumes bought by the yard. It also contains the magnificent organ which was built originally for the house but which people may remember spent many years in the Great Hall at Hall Place. Mounting even higher we came to a beautifully furnished bedroom – the four-poster bed with draped curtains; and here a series of watercolours by Sarah Johnston who lived here at a later date, and showing rooms in the house which provided details which helped in the restoration. And from every room we could see the magnificent views of the Park and realised how even more impressive were the surroundings before suburbia swamped it.

A worthwhile afternoon allowing an easy glimpse on our doorstep of a lifestyle few, if any, of us could ever experience and a delightful venue to which to bring visitors.

2006 Local History Fair at Hall Place

by Katherine Harding and Denise Baldwin

The Local and Family History Fair was held on 11th March 2006. This popular event in Bexley's diary appears to be attracting growing numbers of visitors due perhaps to the ever increasing number of contributors and the variety of exhibits. Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society are regular players on this stage.

The theme of the fair was Victorian Bexley. The society decided, following a suggestion by John Charles, to illustrate through photographs and maps, the transformation of Sidcup from an agricultural hamlet to a commuter suburb, as a result of the coming of the railway in 1866.

The photos we selected from the collection at Local Studies clearly showed that even as late as the 1930s, Sidcup was essentially a rural community although inevitably, the ensuing years were to change the town for ever. Not surprisingly however, it was the enlarged version of the maps of the area around the station that aroused the interest of those who came to our stand.

Thanks to those who helped us to staff our exhibit on the day. At the time of writing, we are busy arranging the 2007 fair which will focus on Scouting in Sidcup in this the centenary year of the movement.



Our stand at the 2006 Local History Fair at Hall Place

Summer Walk at High Elms

by Denise Baldwin

On the 13th June 2006, after a week of high temperatures, winds and thunderstorms the cooler slightly damp weather was a relief. The meeting place for the first of the Lamorbey & Sidcup L.H.S. Summer walks was Morrisons car park and from there to High Elms.

I had little knowledge about the area but was to be fully enlightened by our guides John and Jenny Charles as to its history and delights, together with maps, booklets and photos.

In 1809 a wealthy London banker John W Lubbock (that name certainly caused us problems) bought 260 acres including a farm as an investment and the luxury of having a place in the country. He was created a baronet in 1806 after years as an MP. The farm was his country house and still stands but is now in private ownership. The walk included passing this delightfully renovated farm which includes an old granary now a conservatory. Originally it had a pony gin for pumping water. When John William died in 1816 his nephew, also called John William, became the owner and ran the farm as well as the bank. After 10 years he found the long journey to London tiresome and decided to look for a nearer residence, despite his wife and son's objections. He still kept High Elms and when he died in 1840 his wife and John William, his son returned. All those John Williams do make it very confusing. The new baron was a keen scientist and became a lifelong friend of Charles Darwin who lived at Downe a few miles away. They shared an interest in Natural History and John William spent his life at High Elms running the farm and landscaping the grounds with unusual conifers, cedars and redwoods. He also decided to build a mansion in the classical Italian style including a coach house, stables and kitchen garden. The house was surrounded by elaborate gardens with formal flower beds, later on secluded grottos were added which can still be seen. In 1865 he died and his son, yes you've guessed it, also called John William, inherited. He won a seat for the Liberals in Maidstone in 1870 and was an MP for 30 years. He sponsored the bill for the introduction of August Bank Holiday, in 1900 he became Lord Avebury, a name he took after buying the Avebury Stone site in Wiltshire for the nation. He died in 1913. His youngest son Eric was the first Liberal MP for Orpington. In 1938 the estate was sold to the KCC as a nurses training centre and later a student hostel.

Later the estate was bought by the London Borough of Bromley but sadly the house burnt down in 1967 on, rather poignantly, a Bank Holiday. The building was demolished but the gardens, park and terraces are preserved as a public space with part of the old farm land now an 18 hole public golf course.

There was so much to see including the coach house, now used as a base for the Bromley Rangers, the Eton 5's Court, based on the Eton College Chapel area, including steps and a buttress also an ice well which looked fascinating but not then open to the public.

We walked through a shady woodland and discovered a Lubbock memorial grave and then on to the church of St. Giles with its fascinating church yard, before we returned to our cars.

It was a truly fascinating walk so much Local History and the five of us who had turned up for it thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you John and Jennie for your time and enthusiasm in putting it together

