

Lamorbey & Sidcup

LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2008

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 "Rose Bruford/Early Days at Lamorbey" by Mrs Sylvia Weatherald.

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

(The editor is grateful to Dave Cunliffe for his help in formatting this newsletter)



Presentation in December 2007 by our President Malcolm Barr-Hamilton to our retiring Chairman Eric Percival after 12 years of service

EDITORIAL

By Frances Percival

2007 and early 2008 have not been the best of times for Sidcup for many reasons. The following are some of them.

Lamorbey Park was the first home of the Society and the home previously of the Malcolm Family who were benefactors of the area. In 1841 they built a school in Burnt Oak Lane for the children who lived on the Lamorbey Estate. Latterly the developer, Lakeland Homes wished to demolish the building - their proposal was refused by Bexley Planning Committee. Again, the Planning Inspector refused it on appeal but the developer eventually won by appealing again when a different Inspector was called in and the appeal was upheld. There is a very sad photograph in the May 30th News Shopper of the demolition of the school. Cllr. Jackie Evans said at the time "It will leave a big hole in Lamorbey's history". A new building has been erected on the site that is in sympathy with the nearby houses.

When we drove past The Glade the other day I was aware of what appeared to be white slats. Apparently it is the new Leisure Centre that has been built on part of Sidcup Golf Course (entrance in Hurst Road) which visually encroaches on the vista of The Glade from Halfway Street.

There have been cases in The High Street, Station Road and Blackfen Road where the Council's licensing Committee has come down heavily on shopkeepers and publicans for selling alcohol to underage persons. The Blue Rose was boarded up for some time due to this mismanagement. In the local papers it is now quoted as the 'Blue Rose' also known as 'The Black Horse'. Perhaps we are winning returning the pub to its centuries old name of 'The Black Horse' that was mentioned in coaching timetables.

During the summer, we had the astonishing news that the Bexley Academy of Music and Performing Arts of Station Road had gone bust. Students were locked out whilst other arrangements were put in place. Later the Academy merged with the Doreen Bird School of Dance in Birkbeck Road.

Traffic plans were in the news again of perhaps making Sidcup High Street into a one way system – all still in the melting pot.

Queen Mary's Hospital is also in the spotlight again – we shall just have wait for the outcome of whether we retain an A & E Dept.

The news that the Manor House could lose the status of a Register Office and be sold off by the Council galvanised many people into action. On our behalf, Secretary, Liz Ellicott wrote to the Leader of the Council as did Eric and myself receiving replies that money would be very tight in the next council year and every avenue had to be explored but nothing had been decided. Many other bodies and individuals have objected so we can now only await the outcome.

After the long service of Sir Edward Heath as our Member of Parliament (Past Prime Minister, Father of the House, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, MBE-Military) his successor, Mr.Derek Conway has dragged the Constituency through the mire. Due to the media frenzy 'Old Bexley & Sidcup' is on everyone's lips for all the wrong reasons. When he first arrived in Sidcup I contacted him regarding a Society visit to Parliament. Mrs Colette Conway was most helpful in arranging such a visit. She met us on arrival and ensured after our visit that we were photographed at the Sovereign's Entrance to Parliament. These were happier times.

We can only hope there is once again a return to a more prosperous outlook for Sidcup over the coming months.

SOCIETY NEWS. Liz Ellicott has now very happily completed more than a year as the new Secretary. Eric Percival, retired at the AGM after 12 years in office as



Chairman having followed Iris Heddle after her departure to the Orkneys. At the Christmas Social he was presented by the President, Malcolm Barr Hamilton with two books on maps (Mapping London and The Map Book) with which he was truly delighted.

John Charles was elected as the next Chairman with popular member, Philip Willson being elected to the committee. In the next newsletter there will be 'Getting To Know You' items on both John and Philip.

Liz has also been busy giving the Society its first presence on the internet! The new website which can be found at the following address <http://www.lam-sid-lhs.co.uk> , is a great asset and will continue to evolve.

REMEMBRANCES

We remember with affection our member Mrs Margaret Gallafent who died on 27th March 2007. She is so very much missed by her family and also the other groups that she belonged to, mainly for her organising abilities. Eric and I attended the service at St.Lawrence's after the funeral.

It is also with regret that we record the death of Mrs Barbara Wilder, who had been with the Society for many years attending meetings with her sister Freda Elam.

ROSE ELIZABETH BRUFORD

(1904-1983)

Rose Elizabeth Bruford was born in London on 22nd June 1904 and died in the closing days of 1983. Her lifetime spanned a period which included two world wars and a renaissance in the art of rhetoric. In 1950 she abandoned her prestigious career in order to realise a dream -

ROSE BRUFORD COLLEGE

The following article shows how the dream started to be realised.

EARLY DAYS AT LAMORBEY

By Sylvia Weatherald (nee Holmes).

I was an early student at Rose Bruford Training College at Lamorbey Park, from 1951 to 1954. It was a wonderful three years, and we were very privileged to have been taught by Rose Bruford herself, a woman of imagination and perception, and one who was years ahead of her time in the teaching of speech and drama.

We were thrilled to spend our days at Lamorbey, a lovely house with elegant rooms, including the large one we call 'The Theatre'. I have memories of movement classes

outside by the lake. We had many distinguished visitors and I remember John Masefield sitting under the great Cedar Tree while we practised the art of story telling before him. Sybil Thorndike came, and Peggy Ashcroft and John Laurie, all of whom knew Rose Bruford, and clearly held her in great respect.

In the grounds was an old barn and, while I was there, we all helped to make it into the Barn Theatre. Children would come on a Saturday morning to the Children's Theatre – and they had to pay a few pence for that, because it was believed that the experience would be more appreciated by them if they paid for their entertainment.

We shared the building with Lamorbey Adult Education Centre, and that demanded a degree of tolerant understanding from the adult and from the drama students. As I recall, the head of the Adult Education was Mr Ingram, and co-operation worked well between the two groups.

It was an idyllic three years, both in our education and in the beauty of the setting. Many deep friendships were formed and still today a dozen or so of my year meet to share a meal in each other's homes all over the country, which must say something after over half a century. We all worked in teaching or the theatre, and some are still working. We are healthy lot, perhaps because of all the dance, mime and fencing we did every day. We look back fondly to those formative years at Lamorbey.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

By Bess Dzielski

There are a couple of things I find difficult about Liz Ellicott. A while ago she told me she had once worked for me as a Saturday assistant at Blackfen Library. To my great embarrassment I could not recollect her at all. I wriggled out of it, however, by pointing out that the ones I remembered best were the nuisances. The other thing is that she writes that she is waiting her bus pass. She can't be. (She has just collected it. Ed.)

Looking at the range of interests she lists I can see she will have no difficulty in fitting in the Secretary's job in the Society and Frances will have a worthy successor. She was a teacher, combining what, at first seems a disparate choice of subjects – music and mathematics, but on second thoughts I can see the connection. She lists organ among her subjects and I am sure that ears will be pricked up among local clergy at that.

Born in Bromley, moving to Sidcup via Broadstairs, attending St. Joseph's Convent and Chis & Sid Grammar. She finished at Teachers' Training College and was recently delighted to hear that Hockerill College, Bishops Stortford her alma mater came out top of the country! She worked at Barking & Plumstead. Eventually she turned to Admin. as a Co-ordinator, Deputy Head and Special Needs Co-ordinator! And there's quite a range of family talents too. Husband was an industrial chemist, daughter Catherine has a degree in languages and works in Canary Wharf and son Graham is a lorry driver. She and David are both now retired and to fill in the time she took on work as a part-time traffic enumerator – possibly one of those types with a clipboard – and she reads, does theatre, cooks, studies Family History & IT, does country walks, gardens, visits other people, works two allotments, and is an NSPCC Committee member. Lastly, one thing that I find very warm from a personal viewpoint she works with stroke patients at Queen Mary's. So let's hope she finds a window for Lam & Sid.

BOB WALKER -OUR VERY OWN KING'S SCOUT

By Katherine Harding

You never quite know how things are going to turn out when you begin a new line of enquiry. Will the hours of research be fruitful or merely end in disappointment? It felt a bit like that when Denise and I began to look at 100 years of Scouting in our locality. I felt confident that we would have a good response to our request for memories from former Scouts but I never anticipated the harvest that we would get when Bob Walker handed me his written account of the final stages of his tests to qualify for his King's Scout shortly before war broke out.

As many of you will know, this award was and still is, the highest achievement any Scout can gain and in Bob's day it was an undertaking that demanded an immense commitment and application to attain. Bob's humorous account told a wonderful story that is well worth reading.

Sadly, while he was on active service in Burma during the war, his family home was bombed and along with all the items destroyed or lost was his King's Scout certificate and badge. Bob being the delightful and modest man he is, I decided to make a few tentative enquiries as to whether after all this time, there was any chance these could be reinstated and with ideas from my son, a scout leader himself, I contacted Gilwell, the headquarters of Scouting, to begin my searches. The wonders of email!

With advice from the department which deals with requests such as these, I set about providing all the necessary information from Greenwich, Bob's district, to verify his story. In the meantime, at the History Fair at Hall Place in March, a chance meeting left me with a promise of an old style King's Scout badge with the proviso that Gilwell authenticated my claim on Bob's behalf. As for Bob, he had no idea what I was doing behind his back, as I had not mentioned my enquiries for fear of failure and disappointment for Bob himself.



Scout headquarters agreed to reinstate Bob's King's Scout award.

Nick Grant, the District Commissioner who had helped me with my enquiries, jumped at the chance to reunite Bob with his long lost certificate and badge and it was with genuine pleasure that he presented a very surprised Robert Walker with His Majesty's congratulations on the awarding of his King's Scout.

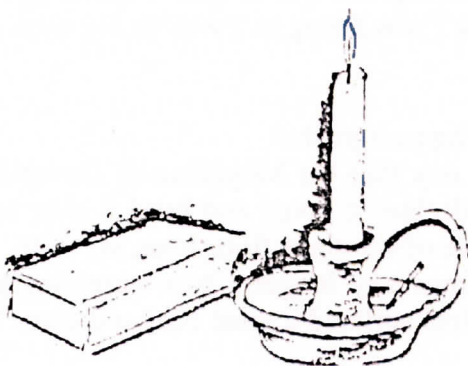
As for the story that had set me off on the quest in the first place, that, at Gilwell's request, is now safely at Scout headquarters as a record for posterity!

REMEMBERING THE GREAT STORM OF OCTOBER 1987

A little booklet was produced in the aftermath of The Storm; so, as we have just passed the twentieth anniversary it is worthwhile remembering the thoughts of the members that contributed articles. Many are no longer with us but are still remembered within the Society, Phyllis Nash (Outings Secretary), and Mary Percival who produced the booklet together with Eric. Iris Heddle (past Chairman – nee Morris) now in the Orkneys, illustrated our words with drawings that really showed the force of the Storm.

The following is the article penned at the time by the late Phyllis Nash of The Grove, North Cray. (Writing also of Footscray Meadows.)

“October 15th, a normal evening and we retired to bed as usual, sleeping well until roused to consciousness by a feeling of uneasiness and then an awareness of an horrendous noise, a never ceasing roar, accompanied by a constant smashing of debris on the bedroom window. So fierce was the impact that it was difficult to get the windows clean afterwards. All the time the dreadful roar continued, Philip, looking out into the darkness, reported large trees being beaten to the ground, then straightening up, only to bend again.



We decided we might feel better downstairs, so we hurriedly dressed but as we reached the top of the stairs, the lights went out and we found that everywhere was in darkness. Street lights, everything had failed. We felt our way downstairs and to where we knew there were some candles and matches.

What a relief it was to be able to see our way around. We thought we would try a portable radio to find out what was happening. By accident we tuned into the Police radio and began to understand the situation. Gradually daylight broke

and the noise lessened. People were venturing out of their homes. Going into the garden we had a strange feeling. Things were different, lighter, and then it dawned on us – the tree had gone. One of two Cedars of Lebanon, which had rather overshadowed us, was missing, uprooted and flat on the ground. A large Holly Tree, two large Mulberries, a Walnut and several tall Conifers, which had always been a background to our garden, were also uprooted. Fortunately all lay across their respective gardens. A large Blue Cedar tree, which had suffered in a previous gale, was even more mutilated. The scars, which still show, are a constant reminder of that horrific night.

After breakfast, Philip went off to check that our elderly neighbours, who had lost their trees, were OK, and to offer help and I went off with my camera into Footscray Meadows. The atmosphere was reminiscent of wartime. People were out chatting, commiserating and exchanging experiences. It was impossible to get near the Church, everywhere was a tangled mass of fallen trees and debris. Trees that had been home to squirrels, birds and insects, gone in a flash. Uprooted trees were scattered about over the Meadows. There appeared to be no pattern. In an avenue of trees, groups had gone in some parts and in places only the odd one had blown down and yet again some sections had not suffered any loss. Looking towards the river to a group of

Poplars and Alders, it was sad to see the tops of these tall trees showing white against the blue sky, just as if an electric flail-cutting machine had torn off the tops of their branches. It was a pleasant sunny autumn morning, especially cruel when one remembered the night and looked at the devastation all around. Yet, thankfully, no one in our area had been hurt.

Today, the dismembered trunks of these majestic trees lie in piles, dusty among the weeds, bearing no resemblance to their former beauty.

Valerie Allen commented on Sidcup Cemetery at Albany Park. “Luckily none of our family graves were damaged in any way. Many of the beautiful monkey puzzle and other trees have disappeared and some of the larger monuments were broken, with many graves disturbed. Nature can sometimes be cruel to tear up trees by the roots that have stood for two or three hundred years and destroy monuments, some of which were over a hundred years old. *Then continued* – I realise that we in our district were lucky that no actual property was destroyed. It must have been heartbreaking for those people who lost their homes. I think we were all thankful that the hurricane occurred in the night. Had it been the previous evening when people were travelling home from work one hesitates to guess at what the death toll may have been. I have not seen such devastation since the bombing in the War and hope not to encounter such conditions again. I learnt afterwards that one or two of our neighbours were really frightened and they wondered how I was faring as I was on my own. (Les was on night work)”.

John Mercer ended his article with the following paragraph:-

“Ironically enough the 16th October was the day that Mr Moynihan (a Government Minister) was coming to Joyden’s Wood to declare it saved and hand it over to the Woodlands Trust. I drove to the woods in spite of warnings from Joan, my wife. The wind was still strong but in no way dangerous any longer. Not surprisingly the official opening was cancelled!! The woods had suffered a great deal and entry from Somerset Drive was not possible”.

Part of Eric & Mary Percival’s article.

“Mary got to work at Avery Hill College. The large dining hall windows were shattered. One student, who had just received a car, found it with a tree crashed through the middle. His family couldn’t help remarking that his grandmother and his mother had the car for years without even a scratch, whereas immediately it came into his possession a tree fell on it! At lunchtime some of the bursars who had come from outer London, had their first hot meal and hot drinks. During the weeks that followed the only hot food they had was in the College canteen. We went to evening classes during this time and, there also some of the members had been without hot food and drink and enjoyed the facilities at Lamorbey Adult Education Centre more than they usually did. We took our dogs for walkies in Oxleas Woods only to get completely lost – all the paths had changed direction or had no direction at all – we had to rely on our dogs to get us out again”.

An extract from Janet Woods article:-

“In some places substantial brick walls were down, whereas in other places wooden fences were standing. Few people went to work that day. The line was blocked at Bexleyheath, and most people were glad of the opportunity to stay at home, trace dustbins and fences, and search for builders. With reputable builders overloaded with work, it gave an opportunity for every ‘cowboy’ in the district to offer building

services at exorbitant prices. Although we all made our own running repairs to property, the impact of that morning will last for many years. Everyone is saddened by the damage to our local parks and woods, and later in the year our own usual holiday to East Anglia revealed areas of devastation. Of course we had seen it all on television, but to actually witness empty space where we were used to seeing gothic arches formed by elm trees means that we have suffered a loss which will never be replaced in our lifetime.”.

Frances Oxley's (later Percival) article:-

As I came home to Beverley Avenue, Sidcup on the night of 15th October, 1987 there was a terrific downpour of rain and the wind was in evidence, at that stage blowing at the normal rate. During the early hours of the 16th, I awoke, and went downstairs to secure the lid of my dustbin, as I was then aware that the wind was blowing extra hard. I managed to return to sleep for an hour or so but the din outside woke me again. By this time I was really feeling quite frightened and was not surprised when my sister appeared saying that she also felt scared. We bunked up together in my bed and neither had any more sleep. We just lay and listened to the ferocity of the wind wondering when everything would return to normality. Came the dawn - it did - weatherwise.

Our telephone was still live and various kind people rang enquiring if we were OK. We realised that the electricity supply had been cut off, so the hunt went on for candles and a battery radio for us to hear the news. The LBC announcer told us that the storm had swept the country, starting with Cornwall and travelled directly North-East to Kent and East Anglia. Previously there had been an abnormal amount of rain, consequently tree roots were within soft earth and could not withstand the terrific force of the hurricane. Fallen trees lying across them blocked roads and railway lines. It was obvious to me that we would not be able to travel to Town. My sister was still worried about this, when the announcer said at 9am. that the radio station had been unable to raise anyone at the Bank of England.

Neighbours started popping in, telling us of damage in our local roads. Whether we were sheltered or just fortunate, our road came through almost unscathed. We ventured out at about 11.30am and were not surprised to find brick walls and trees down in Allandale Road. In Days Lane the Revd.Cunliffe, Vicar of Holy Redeemer Church could not move his car out of the garage, as there was a tree in front of the door. We noticed in Ellison Road, a medium sized van had a tree crash in the middle of it.

When we returned home from the sortie, the electricity supply had been restored. I then decided to take a walk further afield, taking in The Oval, Burnt Oak Lane and Marlborough Park Avenue. The storm had done its worst. Roads were impassable and some houses had trees fallen against the front doors. Unless residents had a back door they must have been trapped. It truly felt like visiting 'The Graveyard of Trees'. It was all very sad and one felt our locality would never be the same.

In the morning for some reason it felt irreverent to photograph these scenes of disaster, but in the afternoon I sallied forth again, this time in the car with the aim of recording the calamity for the Local History Society. By this time many roads were opened up due to the Highways Dept. and residents pushing the trees towards or onto the pavements. I intended seeing what had happened at Lamorbey Park but could not turn left from Marlborough Park Avenue into Burnt Oak Lane as an enormous tree had fallen from a playing field, across Burnt Oak Lane and yes, into the bedroom of Mr.Eric Hinds' house. (WEA Rep.)

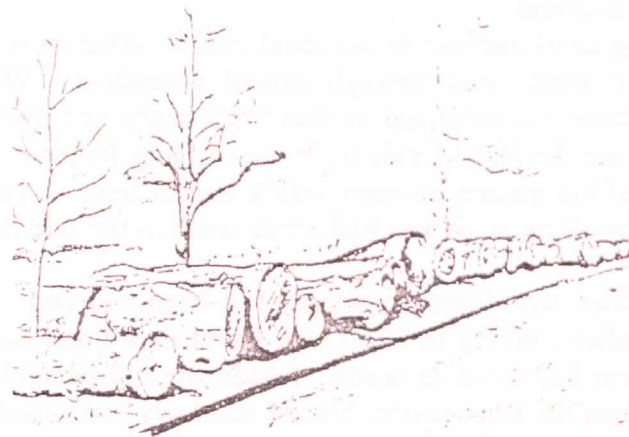
I drove to Sidcup Station where there was a notice stating that one or two trains were going up to London from Orpington but none from Sidcup due to the operation of trees being lifted from the line. On my way home I noticed that several trees were down in The Glade and the magnificent tree, in the grounds of the old Holy Trinity Church School, that I had admired so often whilst waiting for a 51 'bus had lost some of its branches. As I was due to attend a class at Crayford Manor House that evening, I contacted the Principal, Mr Law who said he had been unable to reach the tutor, Mrs Saynor of Shoreham.Kent. For some unknown reason I was able to 'phone her from Sidcup and made contact. It seemed she was in a state of siege – no light – no heat – no hot water – no hot food but, yes, she would be making her way to Crayford from out of the Darent Valley. As the intrepid Mrs Saynor was going to 'make it' from Shoreham there seemed no reason why I shouldn't have a go. Before I left home, I filled my largest flask with boiling water so that she could have a hot drink on arrival home. One of the glorious Cedar of Lebanon trees had crashed in the grounds of Crayford Manor House, fortunately not towards the building. Not in the usual context, but 'How the mighty are fallen', occurred to me several times during the day. Ever the optimist, on the Sunday I decided to take part in the arranged Nat.Trust ramble, which went on a circular tour from Westerham, dropping south. Four of us turned up and we decided to set off. It was a lovely day and the ramble proved quite exhilarating.

Footpaths were no longer apparent, one had to crawl under or over trees to forge ahead. When we came out onto a road it was interesting to speak to young residents who were working with a will in order to clear this main road to Oxted. Telephone lines were hanging down everywhere, they had no electricity supply (I believe this went on for two weeks) and so we quite appreciated it when these young people remarked, "It's a World War III" atmosphere".

News had been coming through over the weekend that some lives had been lost and

considerable damage to property had taken place, particularly in Sussex. We all 'Thanked God' that the full force of the hurricane had hit during the 'wee small hours' when most of the population was tucked up in bed and accounted for.

As a postscript to the above, I recall several months later visiting Chartwell, Sir Winston Churchill's former home. On entering the car park one's eye was drawn to the hill opposite where, magnified



several times over, the scene reminded me of a box of matches having been spilt. The great trees that had probably been painted by Sir Winston had given in to a mighty angry force.

FURTHER SCHOOL REMINISCENCES

Here are two more articles from our 2002 Schools Project when Denise Baldwin and Kathy Harding requested the membership to write of their schooldays. So many members took part in this that there are still more items to be published.

MY NEARLY ELEVEN PLUS

By Den Brittain

My schooldays started in the 1930's, but I do not remember anything about my first school, as it did not leave me with any impression of being good or bad. The earliest recollection I can recall was about 1939/40 when schools were starting to be evacuated out of London. The day I was supposed to go, Mum found out that she could not go as well, so we stayed at home. That would have been School No.2 – Greencoat School at Camberwell Green that in 1972 had become the site of a Health Centre, but this could have changed by now. After this Schools were changed at a fast and furious rate, due to the bombing and evacuation. I cannot remember the order in which I went to them but the list is as follows:-

Schools 3/4/5/6 – St.George's School, Albany Road School, Cork Street School and the Catholic School in Wyndham Road all situated in Camberwell.

Schools 7/8/9 – A School in Redhill, Village School at Ide Hill and a School in Newcastle. These were due to evacuation.

My final School No.10 was Archbishop Temple's Boys Secondary School in Lambeth, very close to Lambeth Palace and not far from Lambeth Walk. This is the one I have the greatest memories of, as it was a very good school and it was a shame that it was amalgamated with another school which I think was Archbishop Tennyson's. The buildings are still standing and every time I take a train out of Waterloo Main Line Station I can see them, which brings back good memories.

So, ten schools of which I remember nine, not a bad score and the reason I gave this article the title "My Nearly Eleven Plus". I wonder how many other people had as many schools.

(What a catalogue of schooling. Ed.)

MY PRIMARY SCHOOL DAYS IN CATFORD

By Janette Cunliffe

As a child I lived in Catford, SE6. In those days everyone that was to go to a state school started in the September following their fifth birthday. There were no free nursery places or reception classes. My first day at school was in September 1965. I can remember it clearly. My mother walked with me to Torridon School and found out which classroom I would be in. As I waved goodbye to her I remember wondering why lots of the other children were crying. I was a very shy girl but I had been looking forward to school for ages as my parents had told me all about it and it seemed like a great adventure.

On that first day at school we were allowed to choose what we wanted to do. I spent most of that day in the book corner. Mum and Dad had spent a lot of time teaching me to read so that, although I was no expert, I was able to keep myself amused. It was in amongst the books on the first day that I met Penny, who went on to become one of my special friends from those days.

I used to go home for dinner. Mum would walk up to the school and bring me home. After dinner we both walked back to school. Mum also came to meet me at the gates at the end of the school day. When I was seven or eight I was allowed to walk as far

as the first road where Mum would be waiting to take me safely across and take me home. Once I had proved to Mum that I was able to cross the road safely I was allowed to go all the way home alone. Hardly anyone had cars in those days and we used to walk to school in what looked like a long procession.

We all had to wear school uniform. Girls wore a dark green skirt and cardigan with a white blouse with a green and white striped tie. At the school now, uniform is optional. Those that do wear it have trousers and a green sweatshirt with school logo. There were no computers in those days. When we were learning to do sums we used shells. They were Ring Top Cowrie shells and they were kept in a big sweet jar. Once a week we had a PE lesson. Sometimes in the summer our class was taken out into the playground to play a game of rounders. We all wore black plimsolls, no trainers in those days. On other days we would have to take off our uniforms so that we were all dressed in white vest and green pants and with bare feet.. We then had to spread out around the school hall to do keep fit exercises as instructed by our teacher. If we had done well we were allowed to climb on the activity bars and ropes. I never did manage to climb up any of those very long ropes.

Free school milk was given to each child every day. It came in small one-portion milk bottles with a silver foil top. The milkman delivered it early each morning and a stack of crates would stand in the playground by the entrance to the school hall. Just before morning playtime the staff would bring the crates round and give a bottle and straw to each child. In winter the milk would be partially frozen and in summer it would be warm and sour from having been left in the playground all morning. At age eleven I moved on to the local comprehensive school, Catford County.

(Mrs Thatcher, as she was then, became infamous for dispensing with the children's daily ration of milk. Anyway, not sure that Janette enjoyed her milk. As I was typing these articles, I was very aware that the twenty years' difference in time, showed that from the frenetic days of the War when Den was tossed from one school to another things had settled down allowing Janette to have a more seamless education.Ed.)

STAND STILL AND FACE THE LIGHT

By Bess Dzielski

Frustrated members of a Lip-reading class got together to let others know of their problems and how to help them and produced these Do's and Don'ts for those organising meetings. Most people with hearing difficulties know their techniques for taking the greatest advantage at meetings – wear hearing aids, always have spare batteries, arrive early to select a place near the front, learn to lip-read, be prepared to point out their difficulties and ask to have things repeated if necessary. But all personal efforts can be sabotaged by lack of knowledge by the arrangers of the meeting if they don't recognise the problem also.

Organisers should arrange a suitable room – one with little background noise and good lighting, which has a loop system fitted (now compulsory under the new Disability Act) and make sure it's switched on, and also produce a written agenda or summary in advance. The Chairman should ensure that questions from the floor i.e. from people not using a microphone, be repeated clearly before being answered and request that people do not talk amongst themselves. And especially, the speaker should be briefed that there will be people with hearing problems and tactfully asked not to wear clothing or jewellery likely to distract the attention of lip-readers.

And the most important thing of all – the speaker’s own techniques. So often one will start cheerfully ‘Everyone hear me OK?’. Those that can will answer ‘Yes’ the others wouldn’t even have heard the question. The speaker must use a microphone (making sure that this also is switched on!), should face the audience in a good light, keep the hands away from the face, have someone else to work the projector and not have all the lights turned down. And should STAND STILL. Nothing is more infuriating for someone who has taken care to position themselves correctly to find that they are looking at the speaker’s profile or even his back as he marches up and down with the sound fluctuating or disappearing altogether! Some approach a questioner to give what seems a personal answer – even more frustrating!

More sensible hearers realise they can’t follow all that is said all the time but lip-readers learn how to use sight and brain together with any residual hearing.

Depending on finances it might be possible to hire a Lip-speaker or Sign Language interpreter. The RNID could help here with information.

But with some common sense and willingness on everyone’s part can do a great deal. So please, stand still and face the light!

(Bess wrote this piece as a member of the Friday afternoon Lip-reading Class at Alma Road, Bexley Adult Education, Sidcup for distribution amongst groups and clubs that have lecturers. We do have several members that use hearing aids – they don’t speak up when the speaker asks (without a microphone) whether he can be heard – as Bess says so succinctly, they are not aware of the question! We are indebted to Bess as our Publicity Officer for all the news about the Society that she manages to get in the local papers and it is therefore only fair that facilities are OK for her reporting our activities. For our Christmas evening Liz engaged a group of ladies learning to lip-read with one completely deaf lady. Two of them acted a scene that took place in a surgery waiting room. The receptionist was perhaps over aggressive but it did bring home that the deaf patient did not hear her name called, did not see the doctor and was treated almost as an imbecile. Let us hope that we hearing people become much more helpful and forbearing in the future. Ed.)

BEXLEY LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY FAIR

By Dave & Janette Cunliffe

Lamorbey & Sidcup LHS were, once again, pleased to host a stand at the Bexley Local & Family History Fair at Hall Place on Saturday, 10th March 2007. The overall theme for the event was that of ‘Childhood’ and our chosen subject “Scouting” (2007 being its Centenary Year).

A wide collection of memorabilia was on show which attracted much interest from visitors of all age groups, many of whom recounted their own memories of both Scouting and Guiding over the years.

There was also a video showing continuously (taken from old cine film) of a 1958 Scout Camp for Sidcup boys which took place in Scotland, together with an excellent display of local Scouting photos through the ages.

A couple of current members of the 6th Sidcup St.Lawrence Scouts were on hand to share their extensive knowledge and impart detailed current as well as historical information.

The overall impression was a very enjoyable event for all concerned. Special thanks are due to Denise Baldwin and Kathy Harding who put a great deal of effort into collecting together the various exhibits, as well as setting up our displays for the day. As is traditionally the case, several members of the Society took turns at manning the stand and chatting with visitors to promote awareness of the Society.

Continuing the subject theme. A talk entitled "A Scouting Tribute" followed our AGM on the 2nd October as part of the Society's regular series of meetings and lectures. This comprised an account of the life and work of Lord Baden Powell, plus an entertaining recollection of an unusual, and particularly eventful, Scouting holiday undertaken several decades ago.

VISIT TO CHATHAM HISTORIC DOCKYARD BY MOTOR COACH

Monday, 9th April 2007.

By Frances & Eric Percival



For once, Easter Weekend was a glorious one for our Visit to Chatham Historic Dockyard. Member Philip Willson had offered to drive a party to the Steam & Traction event held in the grounds. Twenty-one of us travelled in his own coach, an AEC 1964 vintage. As Eric & I were at the front of the coach we could see the effort that Philip had to make turning corners etc. as it was manual driving with a capital 'M'.

We reached the Dockyard within half an hour of leaving Sidcup when Philip parked the coach with the rest of the single deckers. The day was then ours to do as we pleased. Apart from the usual attractions of the Dockyard there were the special displays of the steam-powered vehicles. They made a lovely snorting noise as they puffed around the area together with the unforgettable aroma of coal and steam.

There were also on show some gorgeous Newfoundland dogs pulling miniature carts. One dog was extra friendly so much so that he placed his paws on Eric's shoulders.

We have visited the Dockyard on many occasions when you are aware of great empty spaces but this time the spaces were filled by engines of all kinds and many interested people. A most unusual excursion masterminded by Philip to whom we extend our grateful thanks.

OTHER OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

By Frances Percival

On 30th April 2007 a few members journeyed to Maidstone County Hall for a tour of the Kent County Archives. On Mondays the Archive Centre is given over to visits and so the place was completely empty but for ourselves. Maps and documents of interest to us were spread over tables so that we could pour over them. The Staff were

really most helpful, showing us how to use the computer in our research and gave us free range of the Library. When our Local Studies used to be at Hall Place, unfortunately you had to enter via a very large oak door which was most inhibiting and so I arranged several visits taking us through 'The Door' to the goodies within. Many people now use Local Study Centres for Family History purposes and of course the Internet and so the research world has been opened up for everyone. The Maidstone visit was certainly worthwhile in that although we now owe our allegiance to Greater London nevertheless we are historic Kent and so we were shown documents that related to our past.

On 15th May 2007 we made an evening visit to Well Hall Pleasaunce when we had the pleasure of being guided around by the well-known Eltham historian, John Kennett. Arrangements had been made with Greenwich Council for the grounds to be kept open longer than usual for our tour. With outside funding the Pleasaunce has been replanted and worked that its name 'Pleasaunce' is once again justified. We were reminded of the connection with Edith Nesbitt the author of 'The Railway Children' who for many years lived on site. Members of the Eltham Society were instrumental in forming the 'Edith Nesbitt Society'. It is amazing the number of interesting places there are on our doorstep as for example historic Eltham Palace only half a mile away from this site.

DING DONG BELL

By Jo Symonds

The first impression on arriving at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry for our tour last spring was the unimpressive frontage of the three storey building, part of a 17c terrace, with no indication of the treasures and delights within.

From the ring of the bell as the door opened to announce our arrival to the final ring of a giant bell in the inner courtyard to mark the end of the tour it proved to be a really interesting outing.

The room behind the front door acted not only as an entrance but also housed an amazing amount of information, memorabilia, and a miniature display cabinet showing the process of making the large bells. A peek into the office reminded me of a set out of Dickens – big sturdy wooden furniture, masses of drawers and heavy huge leather chairs together with framed sepia photographs on the walls. An indication of our step back in time - to come.

We learned that the origins of the foundry could go back as far as 1420 but as Britain's oldest manufacturing company it is recorded as established from 1570. The logo of the three bells is based upon that of the master founder namely Robert Mot and has been used continuously since. It was explained that initially bells would have been made by the monks but during the middle ages when the churches grew richer the manufacture passed from monastic to craftsmen. The original site of the foundry was just outside the city wall at Aldgate, a half a mile up the road, and the present site, originally a Coaching Inn, has been occupied since 1738 extended further by the purchase of two cottages at the rear. Ownership has changed hands several times but has remained with the current Hughes family since 1904 and is still a family business with a total staff of 26. Despite its uniqueness it is not recognised for a governmentally recognised apprenticeship and therefore receives no funding. How we value our specialists eh?

The foundry still makes huge bells but has diversified into making handbells and frames for bell hanging. Copper and tin are the main elements for the large bells, 77% of the former and 23% of the latter and this has remained unchanged throughout. The technical side of making the bells is more obscure to me other than to say that the process involves a template which is a full size slice of the shape to be made and the two moulds are carefully brought together leaving a space for the melted metal to be poured within. Loam made with sand, clay, horse manure and goats' hair together with bricks are used to build up the final shape prior to adding the metal. The inscriptions are tapped in before drying. Two sealed furnaces are used in the foundry the largest bell which can now be made on site being 7'6" in diameter. The largest cast ever made there was Big Ben in 1858 that weighed 13.7 tons. The tuning is achieved by carefully removing metal from different areas inside the bell on a vertical lathe. As it is scraped away it goes down in tone thus producing a drop in pitch. A standard bell is pitched between two octaves and this is done by experienced tuners who take a minimum of a year to learn their skill. The pitching is always in the same position that is then lined up with the clapper, the thickest part of the bell deciding its position. The small handbells are made by using moulds of sand put one on top of the other dusted with talc and the void filled with the liquid metal consisting of a lesser 20% tin.

We then moved on through the foundry to the area where the huge steel frames for hanging bells were made requiring 100 bolts per bell. The steel girders are embedded in the wall of a bell tower and the bells sit within each pedestal like a giant meccano.

We were advised that 100 bells are produced a year for this purpose and at least 100 are returned for refurbishment mainly because they are not looked after correctly. Then upstairs to the 'sweatshops' housed in the roof of the main foundry – low ceilings and stuffed full with sagging shelves, drawers, work benches, tools, boxes of all sorts of interesting materials etc – a joy to those guys who like well loaded sheds and of course know where everything is. The carpentry shop apart from its role of providing frames and such also revealed the Company motto 'Nothing is impossible for the man who does not do it himself' but in 200 or so languages! There were also memorial plaques going back several decades for former staff that revealed their loyalty to the company by their long service. Then onwards into the hand bell room where we were met by rows of varying stages of handbells, dull or cleaned, with or without their leather handles, the hard leather being supplied by the only remaining tannery in Britain down in Bristol, and sizes ranging from egg cup to a small bucket.

These bells are also tuned on a lathe using a long handled chisel and again undertaken by experienced tuners. The coolest room up there was where the tuned finished bells were kept with air con! The staff working up there had to make do with fans. Guess the bells are considered more valuable eh?

Down in the courtyard, where apart from a range of large bells there was also a carillon, Mr Hughes our guide also gave us the peal of a large hanging bell which not only concluded the tour but also reminded us of a sound which everyone recognises whether one sees it or not.

The Whitechapel Bell Foundry has provided over the centuries bells to countries all over the world which includes the first American cast in 1702 for Christchurch Philadelphia, The Liberty Bell in 1752 for Philadelphia, St Michael's Charleston S. Carolina in 1761 (which has crossed the Atlantic 7 times in its history), for St Petersburg in 1747, for St Mary's Sidney Australia in 1843 and Montreal Canada in 1847. Additionally, change ringing is peculiar to the English, you'll not hear it elsewhere in the UK or outside our shores other than where they have been installed

by Whitechapel so needless to say the foundry is also kept busy in the repair and renovation field.

Finally, on my tour of the East coast of America this fall I came across a Whitechapel bell in the Post Office building in Washington and the Liberty Bell, with crack, in Philadelphia but unfortunately could not get into St Michael's Church, Charleston to see the much travelled bell housed there. So for me at least I felt the visit in the spring proved not only to be a fascinating tour but added an additional interest to my vacation.

BORDE HILL HOUSE & GARDENS INCLUDING A VISIT TO HEAVEN

By Frances Percival

On 12th June 2007 a coach party made its way to Sussex for a tour of Borde Hill House and Gardens. I had noticed in a Travel Guide that for a few days in the Summer the House would also be open so in spite of the Dunstable day being fixed for the 23rd June (see next article) decided to go ahead with the opportunity of visiting the Gardens plus the House. After coffee and an initial stroll around the gardens we had a tour of the house. We were able to see The Drawing Room containing furniture that dated back to 1601, The Trophy Room and The Dining Room guided by very knowledgeable ladies.

The Gardens are well known in their own right due to the owner, Col. Stephenson sponsoring 'The Great Plant Hunters of the 19th Century' so becoming known as a 'Plantsman's Paradise'. In fact the Garden and Park are Grade 11 listed. As one started on the saunter around you encountered first of all the beautiful rose gardens where the lovely scent of the roses assailed you in a most pleasant fashion. Most people took full advantage of the grounds, as we were so lucky with the weather, seats were scattered here and there offering a welcome rest and yet still feasting one's eye on a horticultural paradise.

We later moved on a few miles to Heaven Farm where a set cream tea was waiting for us – Scones, Cream, Strawberry Jam and lots of tea proved most welcome.

Yet another successful Society coach outing.

DUNSTABLE TUDOR DAY - SATURDAY 23RD JUNE 2007

By Liz Ellicott

Entertainment & Events, Guided Walks, Convening of The Court of Elizabeth I, Armoured Tournament, Wandering Preachers it all sounded very exciting, but how was it going to knit together? I was eager to find out.

We set off in good heart from Sidcup Station, all armed with umbrellas and waterproofs after a wet weekend forecast. After a smooth coach journey, during which coffee was served, we arrived at Dunstable Priory Gardens where we were met by a scarlet-cloaked guide from the Dunstable Heritage Centre. The guided walk times were confirmed and then we were free to wander around the Gardens and enjoy the entertainment on offer.

Around the Priory Gardens various stalls and exhibits were laid out: Tudor candle-maker, apothecary, arrow maker, dyer, musical instrument maker and barber surgeon had all brought items to illustrate their professions and were eager to share their knowledge with the public who stopped to speak or listen to them. King Henry VIII

with his courtiers wandered around looking at the stalls and joining in with the fun of the hobby horse race. Surprise, surprise the horse the King backed won!

As well as these attractions there was the Priory Church of St Peter itself, all that remains of the large Augustinian Priory built in the 12th Century. Doesn't it seem unfair that the site where the decision was made to grant Henry a divorce from Catherine of Aragon should be the first religious house to suffer in the Dissolution? Poor thanks, I thought.

The highlight of our visit for me was the arming of the knight. I found this quite fascinating as the squire helped his knight into layer after layer of clothing and armour. This was rounded off by a very realistic fight between 2 knights. I can still hear the terrifying clash of swords and grunts of effort even now.

The rain held off until the middle of the afternoon when we were just about to start our guided walk, but after a brief introduction inside the Priory House it was fine enough for us to continue. The guide was very knowledgeable and had illustrations to show us so that we could picture exactly what that great priory had been like.

Tea was served in The Norman King Public House plenty of sandwiches and cakes and this is when it decided to rain in all seriousness. The car park was soon flooded and the rain was washing down the road and overflowing from the gutters in torrents. By the time we finished tea the rain had stopped and we were able to board the coach without getting wet. How clever of the organizers to time our visit to such perfection.

This was a very successful outing and one which not many of us would have thought of making if it hadn't been for Frances and Gill organizing it for us.

VISIT TO KEATS' HOUSE, HAMPSTEAD - 9th OCTOBER 2007

By Eileen & Roy Uncles

A grey morning in Bexley and Sidcup saw an intrepid band of travellers setting out to pay homage to a giant of the literary world John Keats. Whilst the journey was in theory not too taxing a combination of the wrong sort of rain and railway time-tabling ensured the majority of the group arrived after the 10.15am deadline suggested for the rendezvous under the clock at Charing Cross.

Nevertheless the party arrived at Hampstead rather wet but spirits undampened. We were greeted by the Curator, Mike Scott, who explained that due to an error by the local educational establishment we were to share the experience with about thirty small school children who were very well behaved but overwhelmed us by sheer numbers. However there was one tangible benefit. That morning the central heating system had ceased to function and the heat given off by the enthusiasm of the children eventually began to dry out coats and umbrellas.

Keats' House is a bit of a misnomer since Keats never owned it and only lived there for a couple of years. It did though play a huge part in his life and it was here that he wrote his very best work. Mr. Scott gave an overview of the building and pointed out the room he lived in courtesy of Charles Armitage Brown. It was here he met and fell in love with the girl next door Miss Fanny Brawne. Sadly consumption dictated he

was to move to warmer climes and he was to die in Italy at the age of 25. Fanny was inconsolable and remained in mourning for seven years.

Keats' youth did not impair his ability to become great and it was humbling to be in the space so important to this literary genius. We were able to wander around at our own leisurely pace and purchase a few souvenirs from the shop.

The visit did much to reinforce the lecture on Keats given earlier in the year and was enjoyed by all. Afterwards the group took advantage of some of the small eateries in the area before making their way home.

Our thanks to Frances for arranging such an interesting outing. Should anyone else wish to visit Keats' House it should be noted that it has just received a large Lottery grant and will be closed for refurbishment for several months.

U3A IN SIDCUP

By Frances Percival

It has a dedicated membership in Sidcup of over 200 members so what is it all about and where did it all begin?

It commenced in France in 1972 as the 'Universites du Troisieme Age' and in 1981 three friends who felt they were embarking on the third age of their lives founded the U3A in this country. The French model was based on 'Second Agers' deciding what 'Third Agers' should learn that was not taken up here as it was decided older people were perfectly capable of teaching each other.

The U3A website says that three things influenced the founding of the U3A,

- A. The rise in the elderly section of the population as the nation's health improved.
- B. The wish to provide for the educational, cultural and social needs of this section.
- C. The wish to do this through self and mutual help with no external help.

No qualifications are required to join - and no qualifications or degrees are awarded.

There are now over 660 branches throughout the UK with a membership of over 188,000.

Our Sidcup branch began in 1994, meeting monthly at St.Lawrence's Church hall with eventually an 'A' list & 'B' list of membership. This came about as the group had expanded so much that accommodation could not be found for everyone at the monthly meeting so the 'B' list members had to forgo the meeting. The situation has since been rectified as meetings now take place in the New Community Church Centre in Station Road and everyone has the opportunity to attend.

There are 45 individual groups that are a mixture of social, craft and study such as Ramblers, Amblers, Play Reading, French, German, Antiques, Concerts, Discussions, Gardening & Criminology! (plus many others). Some are obviously outside meetings but many take place in people's homes. Friendships have been forged due to the U3A and like for like members have met up on their particular subjects.

My personal feeling is the U3A has taken off so well due to the high fees now required by the Adult Education Authority and the requirement of the eternal assessment.

Our U3A in Sidcup certainly answers a need and has now become part of our Local History.

TIDE MILLS

written and photographed by Liz Ellicott

During a recent holiday in Suffolk I was lucky enough to pay a visit to the tide mill in Woodbridge. This attractive white clap-boarded building is on the site of the original medieval mill and was still working until 1957.



I was interested to learn that in the Domesday Book of 1086 over 5000 mills are recorded. All of these would have been water mills, as windmills were not built until the 12th Century. Quite a number of the mills built near tidal waters along the coast and rivers would have been tide mills. The tide mill is a particular sort of water mill, which works by storing tidal water in a large pond, which fills at high tide. The water is retained during the rising tide by gates resembling lock gates or a flap valve and is released at low tide when there is a sufficient head of water to drive the water wheel.

This meant that milling was only possible for as long as the water flowed from the mill pond. At Woodbridge this was a period of 4 hours out of every 12; this was with a mill pond of 9 acres.

There are records of over 30 tide mills being in use along the Thames. These were constructed on or close to the river banks and the tributaries of the Lea and Roding. The adjoining low-lying marshy land was ideal for digging out the large mill ponds necessary for a tide mill. In some cases the tidal water was used to supplement the flow of fresh water in a small stream. These mills served London for centuries, often being rebuilt on the same site several times. Now they are remembered by street names such as Millbank in Westminster and Millstream Road in Bermondsey.

Moving eastward towards Kent there were also tide mills at Wandsworth, Southwark, Deptford, Rotherhithe and East Greenwich. Even further down the Thames there are records of mills on the Thames at Cliffe and several on the Medway including one at Strood, which last worked in 1858. The mill at Dover, which was recorded in the Domesday Book, was also believed to be tidal.



The nearest restored tide mill to Sidcup is that at the Lea Valley Park at Bromley by Bow. The River Lea Tidal Mill Trust has restored the House Mill on Three Mills Island. The House Mill is a Grade I listed building and together with the restored Millers House offers an interesting day out. It is the largest standing tide mill left in Britain, and was working up until the blitz. Mills have been recorded here since Domesday but this particular mill was built in 1796 and was used for grinding grain for the distilling industry. It is open for guided tours

throughout the year.

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