

Lamorbey
& Sidcup
LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2011

LAMORBEY & SIDCUP LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SPRING 2011 NEWSLETTER

CONTENTS

Editorial	Frances Percival	Page 1
Chairman	Philip Willson	Page 2
Obituary- Daphne Prince 1923-2010		Page 3
Outside Activities		
Royal Courts of Justice	Jenny Charles	Page 4
Proposed Trip to Bow	Frances Percival	Page 5
Tour of Danson House	Frances Percival	Page 6
Dover Outing	Eric Percival	Page 6
End of an Era	Frances Percival	Page 7
Bexley Local History Fair	A. Everett & D. Down	Page 7
Other Articles		
The Story of the Tower of London	Jennie Hetherington	Page 8
Macmillan Plaque Unveiled	Frances Percival	Page 9
Getting To Know You Series	Penny Duggan	Page 10
Longlands	John Mercer	Page 10
It's Quicker By Fire Engine	Olive Mercer	Page 12
The Martel Family and Blackfen	Penny Duggan	Page 12
A Few Thoughtful Lines	Anon	Page 13
The Lord Ashcroft Gallery	Frances Percival	Page 14
The Civic Recognition of Dr John Mercer		Page 15
Ash Cloud	Katherine Harding	Page 15
Music in Sidcup	Malcolm Youngs	Page 16
Kent History Federation Conference	Denise Baldwin	Page 16
Honey Robbers & Apiarists	Elizabeth Ellicott	Page 17
Finale	Frances Percival	Page 19

All the articles in this newsletter have been written by members of the Society with the exception of 'Music in Sidcup' by Malcolm Youngs to whom I extend my grateful thanks.

Meetings currently take place at St.Lawrence's Community Centre from September to May.

For further details please contact our Secretary Liz Ellicott on 020 8302 7820

EDITORIAL BY FRANCES PERCIVAL
NEWSLETTER 2011

The last quarter of 2010 seemed just a blur to me as I only managed to attend one Society meeting and the membership in general missed out on two at the end of the year due to the weather conditions. Winter came upon us very early leaving us cocooned in our homes, not having exchanged Christmas cards at our meeting but having to rely on the Royal Mail to convey our good wishes.

As you enjoyed John Mercer's talk on Longlands I asked him for the text so it could be included in the Newsletter. It is always good for the Society to have one of its own members giving a talk but on this occasion even more so, particularly his research on our local history area. A talk is ephemeral but his work can always be referred to in the Newsletter.

Elsewhere you will find John's Bexley Borough Civic Recognition Award Citation.

We all these days travel far and wide seduced by the lovely adverts of golden beaches but many wish to see for themselves how those on the other side of the world live. The Ash Cloud that 'Floated on High' from Iceland due to a volcanic eruption grounded planes to a halt and left passengers stranded worldwide. Various stories were doing the rounds in Sidcup and it was decided that Kathy Harding held the record of being the farthest away in China. I assured Kathy that we would be interested in her Mrs Wu's trip to China and also *her journey back home*.

The first evening back in the autumn term has been beautifully covered by Jenny Hetherington, who obviously enjoyed Mr Keohane's talk on The Tower of London.

The Society had a presence as usual last year at Hall Place at the Local and Family History Fair which will not be staged this year. Those setting up the stall were not happy regarding the site on the upper floor but those attending generally came to see 'the lot' and would have taken the trouble to go to the upper floor. Over many years we have had prime sites, I especially remember when Katherine and Denise had the theme of the 'Suffragettes' using their colours of green and mauve. It was quite outstanding. Let us hope that the tradition of the Fair will not be allowed to lapse. The first Local History Fair was held in 1989 when it was limited to Local History Societies.

I am particularly pleased with another local history article that of Penny Duggan's on Sir Charles Martel of Queenswood House, Blackfen. This was sparked off by correspondence that was placed in last year's newsletter when his name was mentioned. Blackfen is the poor relation of our local history area in so many ways and to actually have somebody from the 'gentry' living there, Gee Whizz – as someone of my generation would say! Penny is concentrating on the Blackfen area and is aiming by the end of the year to publish a book on her findings. She has already held sessions at Blackfen Library and has found that locals are only too willing to come forward and offer their reminiscences. She comes of a Blackfen family and I am sure her family is steeped in local history.

The year 2010 was our river cruising year – we have decided, that is, Eric and I, that we will never set foot on another cruiser. In the early part of the year we cruised Holland and Belgium which meant negotiating lock after lock. It did have compensations as we visited magical cities such as Antwerp, Brussels and of wartime remembrance, Arnhem. In September, we set off for a three-week cruise from the Black Sea to the North Sea. We came back with snap shot memories of places and

the thought that we had toured countries that only a few years previously had been at war. Our fellow travellers were very interesting coming from Canada, America, Australia and New Zealand. Whilst on the boat the New Zealanders were worried about the earthquake in their area and knew people involved. What a small world we live in! And now at this particular time of writing we have contacted an Australian couple who live west of Brisbane, apparently water has been lapping at their door. There seems to have been one disaster after another this last year. We live in an age of instant communication – were these things happening previously and not reported so widely?

PS. On return home from the longer cruise I went down with a chest infection that kept me away from the Society nearly all the Autumn/Winter term. (The Boat was absolutely spotless so I must have caught the germs on the journey home.)

For this newsletter, I would like to thank member, Penny Duggan for her assistance in the formatting and setting up of it.

A FEW WORDS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – PHILIP WILLSON

Greetings Everyone! I trust that you continue to enjoy your membership of the Society, but we will need your support to ensure that Lam & Sid can thrive into the future. More on this later.

This has already been an unusual season for me having seen my daughter, Jane, get married on 18th September at Emmanuel Church, Hadlow Road. As if this wasn't excitement enough, it was soon followed by my voluntary severance/early retirement just twelve days later.

I aim to have an active retirement and already I seem to be in the mode where I don't know how I had time to go to work! It's not even due to having started much in the way of new activities as most of them have been around for some time. For a start I have begun to pick up the pieces of my family history, which I started nearly twenty years ago but which was forced to take a back seat for a while.

Then there is my 1970 Triumph Herald that I took to pieces in 1999 when it became quite rusty. I have done quite a bit of the necessary bodywork but nowhere near enough. However, that is also beginning to make some progress. It would be nice to finish it this year so that I could take it to a show or two and get some use out of it - and maybe bring it along to a meeting to show it off.



“The Triumph Herald – now and what it should look like”

In addition, I am helping some friends with the restoration of their 50-year old Albion (Scottish-built Leyland) bus. This is only occasional work but my task is to sort out all the electrical systems. This is not too onerous as most of the work required over the

next couple of years will be on the body and I am trying not to get too involved with that. After all, I have my own coach to keep up to scratch!

We were very sorry to have called off the last two meetings in 2010, in particular the Christmas Social, but the weather was very much against us. Having spoken to several of you on the ring-round, I know that the turnout would have been extremely small on both occasions and we didn't want anyone taking any unnecessary risks in the snow and ice.

I don't wish to speak too soon, but we seem to have had a two or even three-year run of excellent talks that have been well supported and well received. It has been quite some time since we last had a 'disappointing' evening in this regard. For this I must thank Denise for organising the speakers and everyone else who has contributed to the running of the Society in any way.

I hope that by the time you read this we will have a new person to look after our outings so that side of the Society's life can resume.

You will all by now be aware of the financial situation following the huge rise in the venue rental fees. It has put a whole new complexion on the situation discussed at the AGM and we will, I hope, have made our plans to cope with this so that we are ready for the next season.

We don't want to change the essential character of the Society and it would be great if between us we could encourage more people to join. This, along with trying to become more research-active as a Society (a small number are very active already, as we know) should give us the boost we need to take us forward. We know of some history societies that have closed in recent times and we don't want the Lam & Sid to disappear just as it reaches its 60th birthday in 2012.

So, please continue to support us, perhaps by encouraging friends to join. Alternatively, if you feel that you can help the committee in any practical way, then we would love to hear from you.

OBITUARY

Daphne Prince 1923-2010



Daphne had been a loyal member of the Society for many years, attending meetings when we were at Lamorbey Park. She was always willing to assist with any jobs that 'oiled the works'. It was a pleasure knowing Daphne could be relied upon for various tasks. When the outings were announced she and her friend Mary Boorman were always at the front of the queue for coach seats. They particularly enjoyed our trip to Bletchley Park where they found a glass case containing Wrens' uniforms.

At the early part of 2010 Daphne needed to have a new central heating system put in her property. Unfortunately one of the old radiators fell on her leg and she was trapped for some days. She was taken to St Thomas's Hospital and died there on 20th February. Four Society members were at her funeral, and as is always the case at these sad times we learnt that she was indeed a Wren, she had married a sailor and their child had died in its early years. She didn't, I think, due to his ill-health, have many years with her husband. Nevertheless she soldiered on and spent many happy years in Sidcup.

VISIT TO THE ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE 12th FEBRUARY 2010

by Jenny Charles

On a cold grey February morning the society members assembled in the waiting room of Sidcup Station. There was a points' failure at Hither Green which resulted in everyone missing two trains. However, a helpful member of the station staff advised that there was an alternative route to London by Slade Green and Woolwich, so we all walked over to platform 2 to catch this train. We were accompanied on the train by our guide, so everyone felt very relieved we were all subject to the same delay. The journey itself was uneventful and Eric maintained phone contact with the society members who are making their own way to London and meeting under the clock at Charing Cross. Despite the delays everybody made it and our fascinating tour of the Royal Courts of Justice started only half an hour later than scheduled.

The purpose of creating a Supreme Court was to bring together a number of separate courts around Westminster Hall that resulted in a very time-consuming and costly service. (A good example of the old system can be found in the Charles Dickens novel *Bleak House*). The system was so complex that it was considered unacceptable and with support from both Disraeli and Gladstone the Judicature Acts of 1873-75 abolished all the Courts of Judicature and established one Supreme Court of Judicature. In 1981 its name was changed to the Supreme Court of England and Wales. *

The building of the Supreme Court of Judicature began in 1873 following a competition to design the building. In 1868 eleven architects submitted their designs and George Edmund Street was successful and went on to design the entire building from its foundations to the amazing varied carvings and spires. There was also a great deal of debate about the location. In the end 7.5 acres of slum dwellings were purchased for £1,453,000. 453 properties were demolished which housed over 4000 people.

Messrs Bull & Sons of Southampton undertook the construction of the Court. The work took more than eight years. George Edmund Street died before it was completed but his son finished the work. There are over 1000 rooms in the building (of which 88 are courts) and 3.5 miles of corridors. 35 million bricks were used in the construction. Queen Victoria opened it in December 1882.

During the construction local workers went on strike and Bull & Sons brought in labourers from Europe. These workers had to live in the partially finished court building because if they lodged outside they would have been in serious danger of being attacked by the strikers. Evenings in the Court were dull and the labourers passed the time by doing carvings on the pillars. However, despite the grandeur of many parts of the building, Street wanted the pillars to be plain and austere so he put a stop to this as soon as he could.

Our guide took us into Court 4, one of the smaller courts, and we sat on the benches reserved for barristers and solicitors whilst he talked to us about the Court. It was much smaller than the society members expected and the walls were lined with books which contained previous cases. The guide told us about court etiquette and also explained that there are six religious texts to enable people from different faiths to swear oaths.

After leaving Court 4 we walked along the corridors and had glimpses of larger courts where cases were being heard. We eventually found ourselves in the highly decorative Painted Room. The room has beautiful panelled ceilings and the walls are so intricately painted that our guide told us they are often mistaken for wallpaper.

Whilst in the Painted Room we saw several large prison vans which were transporting prisoners who were having appeals heard. The guide told us that following their hearings some would be returning to prison and in some cases their sentence would have been extended. Others would be leaving through the front entrance.

We then proceeded to an adjoining room called the Bear Garden. Apparently this got its unusual name because a great deal of litigation was settled outside the masters' chambers and on one occasion when Queen Victoria visited she said the noise sounded like a bear baiting competition! On two of the walls are pictures showing one of the unsuccessful designs submitted for the competition in the 1860s. These were done by George Gilbert Scott, who was the teacher of Street, the successful architect. Today the Painted Room and the Bear Garden are used as waiting areas for barristers, solicitors and their clients to discuss their cases.

We then visited the Costume Gallery and also saw the unusual statue of Lord Harry Woolf who was Lord Chief Justice from 2002 to 2005. It is constructed entirely of metal coat hangers and is said to closely resemble him!

Our final route was through the main hall walking over the magnificent mosaic floor. We looked up at the majestic spires and considered the grandeur of this iconic London building. There is a strong sense this is a working place fulfilling the aims, outlined by Queen Victoria when she opened the Court, of providing "more speedy and efficient administration of justice to her subjects".

*In 2009 it changed again to the Senior Courts of England and Wales, following the creation of the Supreme Court of the UK.

PROPOSED TRIP TO BOW, LONDON E3, APRIL 9TH 2010.

by Frances Percival

The outing was actually set in concrete and was to the Ragged School and to Queen Mary College but was thwarted by action or non action of the Transport Union. It was all such a pity, for when I first mooted the idea, Philip Willson immediately suggested, in addition, an afternoon visit to the grounds of the College and inside to part of what was left of the People's Palace. (This was music to my ears!) So, we had the outline of the visit and plans went ahead accordingly with my contacting the Ragged School and later Eric and I travelling over the water to East London. We felt there would be sufficient interest at the School to make a good visit especially as the guides were steeped in the missionary deeds of the great Dr Barnardo with the East Enders of the Victorian era. There was also a schoolroom where we would be taught the 3 'R's. Phillip found us after our recce of the School and after a short walk we were in the grounds of the College where I was overwhelmed by the old and new architecture working so well side by side. It was all rather peaceful wandering by the river and, being a recess, having only the occasional student wandering past. He then took us into the building and I saw the remaining part of the People's Palace, down the Mile End Road, I heard of in my childhood but had never entered. It was very much of its period – art deco.

At that stage Philip was still working at the College so had to leave us but indicated where we could visit our President, Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, at work in Bancroft Library as one of the two archivists of the Borough of Tower Hamlets. The room was as tall as it was long housing records of such magnitude that the public are not allowed to browse along the shelves. Having left Local Studies at Bexley 16 years ago, an area which had a mainly gentrified history until the advent of the railway in

the 1800s, Malcolm had to acquire the history of an area next door to the City of London and that of the Great Docklands in its heyday and much, much more.

I may appear to have gone off at a tangent but I have always found the reconnaissance of a trip so interesting as it has usually thrown up unexpected points that you can later incorporate on the actual day. People on the spot are always willing to open up about their village or town and you then take pleasure in passing it on to Society members.

We decided the plan would work quite well and were pleased that at the next Society meeting on 16th March, 25 members also liked it when a fee of £4 was collected. The route from Cannon St Overground Station was Cannon St Underground to Mile End with Philip leading the way. All was well until a few weeks later the Transport Union announced they would be striking on the very day we would be using the Underground. This meant that commuters would also be using the buses. We kept hoping that the Union would pull back but Philip was due up in the Northeast of England until the day before the outing. As Philip was half the trip we just had to cancel. As you know, in the event the Union called the strike off at the last moment.

It was the first occasion that a planned event had to be cancelled due to a strike...

I lately indicated at a Society meeting that contact has been made with the Ragged School – OK, one could not now go into the College, but perhaps a visit to the Whitechapel Art Gallery could be tagged on instead. There are other possibilities.

TOUR OF DANSON HOUSE, SUNDAY 9TH MAY 2010

by Frances Percival

The volunteer guide, Cllr Walters, was very knowledgeable and retained everyone's interest leading fourteen of us round the Mansion. I remember from the time many years ago that members of the Conservation Panel were invited to see the inside of the house that was a virtual wreck. Since then English Heritage has been hard at work, the transformation is breathtaking. Each room is perfect in itself. And of course, the organ has been returned from Hall Place to its rightful place within the Mansion.

Members of Bexley Borough Council must have been justly proud when they entertained Her Majesty the Queen within its portals. Indeed, historically, it is the jewel in Bexley crown, together with Hall Place and the Red House.

DOVER OUTING, 12TH JUNE 2010

by Eric Percival

It was a fine day when members of the Society and their friends joined the coach for a pleasant journey to the coast. Our objective that day was Dover Castle where English Heritage had mounted one of their most ambitious projects, this was to recreate the castle as it was in the time of Henry II. In the King's time Dover was the gateway to England for visiting nobility and the reigning monarchs of Europe. To impress them the King decreed that their welcome should be of the grandest and in the most magnificent surroundings. On entering the Great Tower we found a group of historical actors playing the part of the king and his courtiers. This was very entertaining and informative; the actors did their best to engage the audience, at one

time asking if the king should support the Pope in the persecution of the Cathars in France.



Lunch was taken in the NAAFI (unlike any I knew!) after which we rejoined our coach for the journey to the next meal, tea. The destination was the Elham Valley Vineyard, but having taken the wrong road we enjoyed a pleasant ride through the countryside. We eventually arrived at the vineyard where cream teas and other tempting cakes were available, also there was a large number of plants for sale of

which members took advantage, the coach returning to Sidcup heavier than when it left.

END OF AN ERA

by Frances Percival

I have managed to acquire four full files of outings that have been in the main organised by myself. When I first joined the Society in the '70s its doyen, Mr Nunns, had just left for Deal. He put forward local trips and then Mrs Phyllis Nash became the Outings Secretary. Her trips were memorable because it always seemed to rain but we did travel to unusual places such as Ayot St Lawrence, Lacock Abbey and Ickworth for instance. My friend, Norma Huntley, followed her for a year or so until she moved down to Winchelsea. (Norma's legacy to the Society was our logo that was prepared in the art studio where she worked). And so in 1992 began my long-standing time as Outings Secretary combined with other jobs. In some years we had four outings which perhaps included two coach tours. None of this was a chore as Society members responded wholeheartedly to the suggested tours that were put before them. I must pay tribute to my trusty lieutenant Gill Brown, who did the recces with me in the early days, reading the map whilst I drove the car. Later it was we three as Eric came into the picture and took over the driving. In the 2005 Newsletter I listed the outings from 1992 to 2005 that I had instigated which looked quite formidable. Add on the last five years so perhaps I can blow my own trumpet and say I have not resigned but have *honourably retired*.

BEXLEY LOCAL AND FAMILY HISTORY FAIR

by Angela Everett and Dorothy Down

We were pleased to have a stall at Hall Place on **6 March 2010**, along with many other organisations. This was to give the public an idea of who we are and what we do.

Two of our members, Denise Baldwin and Kathy Harding, set up the display on the first floor in a rather limited space. Despite this, several people came to speak to us and to browse through some of our archive material. We also had the computer available for up-to-date information.



Various members manned the stall throughout the day and we sold several copies of our disc, "Sidcup Caught in Time, 2009".

There were other displays and talks on local subjects, with digital slide shows from the Dewey and Boswell collections of photographs. Antique books and postcards were on sale in the Austin Gallery.

All in all, the exhibition was well displayed and attended – a great success!

THE STORY OF THE TOWER OF LONDON

by Jennie Hetherington

On the 21st September 2010 I attended the new season of Lectures organised by the Society.

The evening started with our Chairman stating he was tired as last Saturday his daughter got married and he was still in recovery mode! He welcomed us all and introduced our speaker for the evening that was Mr John Keohane from the Tower of London who was going to talk to us regarding the duties of a Yeoman Warder at the Tower.

We had no idea of what a treat we had in front of us! First of all he dressed in his 'normal uniform' to show us what it was like and then on a projector showed us the 'state uniform' that is worn on all special occasions. He went on to tell us that there are 36 male warders and 1 female warder housed at the Tower and that one of the houses where they live is one of only two pre-1666 houses in the City of London. It was, of course, not destroyed by the Great Fire of London, being protected by the walls of the Tower. There are 47 families who live within the walls, sited around a green called the Tower Green. He made us laugh explaining that foreign visitors turn the meaning round and go looking for a green tower. There is no security of tenure in the living accommodation as the house is provided with the job, which you have to leave after the age of 65. He informed us he had only 18 months to go when he would retire to his home in Devon, where his wife seems to spend more and more of her time now, getting it ready for their move down there.

The next part of his talk was how a member of the armed services became a Yeoman Warder. The criteria used are as follows: - the serving man or woman has to complete 22 years of service, attain the rank of Warrant Officer or Sergeant Major and be 40 to 55 years of age. Mr Keohane had worked his way up to the top, now being 'Holder of the Keys'. He was undoubtedly proud to have achieved this position and he explained next what this entailed.

When Wellington was in charge of the Tower of London, he decided there was to be a curfew at 10pm every evening when the Tower would be shut down and all men still absent after that time would become AWOL. The chief warder (Mr Keohane) is responsible for this ceremony which can be watched by the general public at 10pm

every evening. The gates are locked up and the keys are presented to the Keeper and a bugler plays a last post.

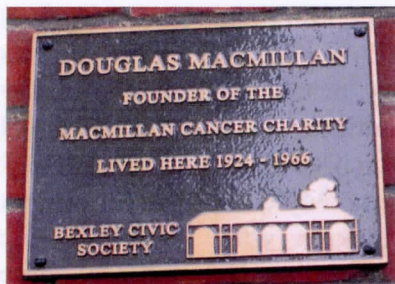
Having fascinated us with these facts, and showing us many interesting slides, Mr Keohane went on to relate some of the history of the Tower which can be viewed on the Internet. Having read this when I got home, I realised how little I knew about one of our great buildings that has been in existence in one form or another since the building of the first Tower in 1147. Did you know that several hundred years ago two small bodies were discovered by builders renovating a staircase in one of the towers? They are believed to be the remains of the young Princes imprisoned by Richard III, who disappeared from the Tower and were never found. It is rumoured that Richard III had them murdered although it was never proved. Their small remains were reburied in Westminster Abbey. Perhaps one day forensic tests could be used to prove whether they were the princes.

Mr Keohane was thanked for a very informative and interesting lecture and was certainly a great start to the Society Lecture Season.

MACMILLAN PLAQUE UNVEILED

by Frances Percival

A plaque to the memory of Douglas Macmillan was unveiled on 29th October 2010 on the outside wall of No 11, Knoll Road, Sidcup. The great and the good had gathered on the forecourt of Denise Baldwin's home for the ceremony, on an exceedingly cold windy morning. It was a Bexley Civic Society occasion chaired by the present Chairman, Ken Chamberlain. John Mercer in one of his many roles had championed



within the Civic Society that Douglas Macmillan should be honoured in Sidcup with a Blue Plaque. Douglas did live for a short time in Pimlico and this is where English Heritage saw fit to erect their blue plaque. Denise and her husband Alan agreed that as Douglas had previously lived at their house for 30 years it would be appropriate for such a remembrance to be placed on its outside wall.

The gathering was made up of members of the Civic Society, the instigator of the project John Mercer and his wife Olive, the Percivals for Local History, Ward Cllr Jackie Evans, MP James Brokenshire, Regional Director of Macmillan Cancer Support, Stephen Richards and Madam Mayor, Cllr Val Clark. And not to be forgotten, four founder members of the Macmillan charity shop in Crayford High Street now unfortunately closed. Denise informed us later on that the older lady in the wheelchair, one of her neighbours, actually remembered Douglas living at No 11. What a link that brought to the ceremony.

At last the speeches began, with poor Katherine Harding clutching the ribbons that held the balloons, hiding the plaque that was to be pulled by the Mayor! She certainly did sterling work keeping it all intact! The wind was so vicious.



Every Bexley Mayor says how much they learn of the Borough, as their year is so intensive. Cllr Clark revealed much the same thing saying she had no idea that Macmillan Cancer Support had its roots in Sidcup. This was the very point that Denise and Katherine in their excellent lecture to us in January said they were on a mission to do: educate people that there was a real person behind the MACMILLAN Cancer Support. I am sure you will agree that they are holding the banner aloft.

And so Katherine gave the ribbons over to the Mayor who gave the time-honoured tug and the balloons fell away revealing the Civic Society plaque dedicated to Douglas Macmillan whereupon there was much applause.

Then followed speeches by Stephen Richards from Macmillan Cancer Support and our MP James Brokenshire who particularly dwelt on the drive of Douglas Macmillan after he had witnessed his own father die from cancer.

Finally, Denise Baldwin, our hostess, came forward and in her inimitable way gave details of how, after finding that the great man had lived in the house before her, had decided with her friend Katherine Harding to discover as much about him and his deeds as possible. This they have done. Even, as you know, enlightening the Head Office Staff of today of the man behind the headline.

Remembering we were only mortal, our hostess invited us inside No 11 Knoll Road to a very nice buffet.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU SERIES

PENNY DUGGAN in her own words

I have lived in Sidcup all my life, apart from a three-year stint in Norwich while at university. I was brought up in Blackfen but now live in the Longlands area. I work as a reference book editor for a London publishing house. My interest in history has developed over many years and encompasses local history, academic study and family history. I was a volunteer at Erith Museum from 2006 until its closure in 2009, and I have been a volunteer at Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre since 2006. I recently became Secretary of the Bexley Historical Society. My current major project is to investigate the history and development of Blackfen with a view to the publication of a book in association with Bexley Local Studies. If I find any spare time, I like to play the piano, visit historical sites (with a particular soft spot for castles) and potter about the garden.

(Penny was on the register of the Society when we were at Alma Road and I think left us when her studies intervened. Editor)

LONGLANDS

by John Mercer

The Longlands area of Sidcup gets its name from a house called Longlands. It was built sometime between 1730 and 1740. There is no photograph or drawing of the property, but it was probably of red brick with a tiled gable roof. It had a curved drive leading to it from Footh Cray Road (now Main Road) with a lodge. There was a farm with farm buildings to the west, and according to the Tithe Award Map of 1841, there were several fields making up the estate, in all occupying 54 acres. The site of the house is now occupied by Nos 41-43 Parkhill Road. This road runs off Longlands Road to Main Road, with a distinct rise in the middle of the eastern end. The house was on the top of this rise, and behind where there are now back gardens lay the farm buildings. To the east side of the house lay a lake fed by the Wyncham Brook. It is

built over now but the lake was where Bedford Road is found today. Looking from Longlands Road into the entrance to Bedford Road is a slight slope showing where the lake once was. The other side of the lake, the east side, is now filled by the houses and gardens of Woodside Road. To the east lay Priestlands Wood. The former wood is now allotments to the north and housing to the south, with the recreation ground, linking to Priestlands Park Road, and containing some of the original trees.

Just by the entrance to the recreation ground from Longlands Road is a boundary stone between the parishes of Foots Cray and Bexley. So the parish boundary must have run along what is the south side of Longlands road. Longlands Road did not exist until the 1880s when "St Mary's" and "Devonshire House" were built on the site of what is now "Wyncham House". Further along to the west, just before the junction with Longlands Park Crescent, several houses were built at the turn of the century, including Nos 63 and 65, which were built over the brook. The cellars of these two houses still flood up to 6 inches when there has been heavy rain.

The first house to be built on Longlands land was "Lynton" on the west corner of Shirley Road, and the second was "Locksley" on the west corner of Parkhill Road where it joins Main Road. "Locksley" was demolished before the 1939-1945 War to make way for the shops on Marechal Neil Parade. Parkhill Road has some fine houses dating from 1890-1900, but Longlands Park Crescent is wholly a post war development. The small terraced cottages in Shirley Road and Woodside Road date from the mid-19th century, those in Bedford Road are later. They provided housing for the growing artisan population in Sidcup.

As far as can be ascertained, the Russell family lived in the big house from about 1800. George Russell was a self-made man. In his obituary notice in the "Gentleman's Magazine" of 1804, it is recorded that he was a soap maker with a factory on the Thames. He began making soft soap and then turned to hard soap. His price of soap governed all the soap made in England. This was a time when the importance of soap was being advocated by doctors, to improve cleanliness when there was a steep rise in the population. In 1851 Mrs Emma Donaldson was living in the house. She was the widow of a brewer. She was born in Yorkshire, was 36 years of age at the time of the census, and had three children: Alex aged 9, Helen aged 7 and Gertrude aged 2. She employed four servants in the house and there were two gardeners. The head gardener lived in the lodge and had a wife and two children. In 1864 the property was conveyed to Major R. Webster, but by 1885 the house was derelict. The land was bought by E. J. Harland who used the materials of the house to start a brickworks. This soon spread to the adjoining gardens and fields. He supplied the bricks for the expansion of Sidcup, and Harland Avenue is named after him.

The Marechal Neil Parade, developed in the 1930s, stands where the house so-named was built in the 1880s and named after the French general who led the French army prior to the defeat of Napoleon III at Sedan in 1870. It was this defeat that ended the Bonapartist regime and brought the Emperor to Chislehurst, and presumably also a French follower who had the house built in Sidcup on the former Longlands estate and named after the general. It is unfortunate that no picture of the house can be traced.

Why did Longlands House fall into ruins? Why was there no further occupant? Was the house in poor condition and nobody was prepared to restore it? We shall never know.

**IT'S QUICKER BY FIRE ENGINE or
YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE**

Living in Sidcup in 2010 by an exasperated Olive Mercer

If you want to go up to London in the evening or at the weekend, you can park at Sidcup Station. It saves a walk home from the station in the dark later on. Which train are we catching? Allow twenty minutes. Reach the crossroads by Marlowe House. OH NO! Once again we have forgotten about the roadworks - you can't get there from here. Into Faraday Avenue for the three-mile circular, sorry, rectangular trip via Hurst Road to Sidcup Station car park. The traffic stretches all the way to Bexley Lane. Twenty-five minutes later, still in Faraday Avenue, with no one but a police car able to go ahead, desperation sets in. Cars appear at the side roads. Never mind road courtesy. Don't let them push in. We've missed at least one train. I told you we should have walked to the station. Push into crossing traffic, onto Foots Cray Lane, down Hurst Road into Halfway Street, on the wrong side of the road, through the ingenious slalom to the car park. The next train is late. Pant into cinema, late, treading on toes. Sorry, sorry. Missed the beginning. Can you follow this? Who is she? Wasn't she in that film... SHUSH. Sorry.

Back at the car park later, manoeuvre through the other slalom to the traffic lights. Home at last. Did you manage to work out what the film was about? If Faraday Avenue is too much for you, try diverting along Hatherley Crescent (watch the slalom barriers) and take the back way to Bexley Lane. Another jam. If you choose this route, when you pass the tailback in Faraday Avenue, don't let them push in. 'Shops and businesses open as usual?' Where will you park? Old Farm Avenue. Just go down Faraday Avenue... Oh, forget it. Poor shops, poor businesses. 'We apologise for any inconvenience', they say. Do you think those little cameras on the traffic lights are making a film of our progress as we negotiate the ever-changing track through the shifting barriers? Watch out on TV: there will be a new programme, 'The Craziest Sidcup Roadworks Ever'. And we'll all be in it.

(I asked Olive if she would write, if it were at all possible, an account of the day to day trial of travelling around Sidcup. The situations we have all endured have been covered in an ironic amusing way, don't you think so? Editor)

THE MARTEL FAMILY AND BLACKFEN

by Penny Duggan

I read with interest Liz Ellicott's 'A Story of Wartime Sidcup' in the Spring 2010 Newsletter, in which she told of a visitors' book belonging to Surgeon Rear Admiral Sir William Pryn of 3 Christchurch Road. One of the names in the book was Brig.-Gen. Sir Charles Martel of Queenswood, Black Fen. As someone researching the history of Blackfen (as it is now known), I was intrigued by the link between Martel and another distinguished local resident.

Brig.-Gen. Sir Charles Martel, CB (1861-1945) served in the Royal Artillery before holding various appointments at the Royal Arsenal Woolwich, retiring as Chief Superintendent, Ordnance Factories in 1920. He married Lilian in 1884 and they had a daughter, Adèle, and a son, Giffard (later Lt Gen. Sir Giffard Martel). The family bought Queenswood in 1910 and lived there with several servants. It was a large house, originally built in 1861, with substantial grounds. A drive led to an entrance lodge on Blackfen Road, where Premier Autocentres now stands, and there was another entrance lodge on Days Lane.

I corresponded with Pryn's grandson, Mr Anthony Greenstreet, who had made the discovery, and the visitors' book revealed that Martel and his wife had visited on 15 April 1930 and that the day on which the Martels were themselves 'at home' to visitors was Saturday. According to documents in the archives at Bexley Local Studies, the Martels enjoyed holding luncheon parties which began promptly at 1pm and ended by 3.15pm.

I wonder what the Martels talked about with their guests. Did they perhaps discuss their dismay at the changes taking place in the local area? In 1930 Blackfen was on the verge of massive development. When Martel bought Queenswood in 1910, Blackfen was a hamlet surrounded by woodland, farms and streams. The few neighbours he had were farm workers. There were no commercial premises except for the small, cosy Woodman Inn and a tea shop. But in the 1920s things began to change: first Mrs Bean of Danson died and the estate, which extended into Blackfen as far as Westwood Lane and Blackfen Road, was broken up and sold. Then came the electrification of the railways, making land on the outskirts of London more valuable than ever. Shortly afterwards the Rochester Way was constructed, improving access further. The tide was turning: people began buying up plots of land, building their own houses and bungalows while camping in shacks and huts, with just an 'earth closet' for sanitation. Before long, developers wanted to buy up large areas of land to build whole estates. Martel sold Queenswood to C. R. Leech in 1931 and it was soon demolished and replaced by hundreds of small houses which were affordable for the families who were encouraged to move to the district from London's crowded inner suburbs. New Ideal Homesteads claimed in its brochure 'it is intended that the charming countryside shall permanently maintain the rural character of its vistas and not suffer disfigurement in any way'. It is difficult to see how they envisaged keeping this promise given the scale of the estates they were building! Within a short space of time, the woodland and farms were gone, replaced by houses, shops, schools and churches. Even the old Woodman Inn was taken down once a more spacious pub had been built behind it.

Martel moved to Exmouth in Devon. He renamed his new house 'Queenswood', suggesting a fondness for his old home in Blackfen. No doubt his decision to bail out of the developments in the Sidcup area and find a comfortable 1920s property was in the end applauded by his family as 'Queenswood, Black Fen' had no such modern facilities as hot water, electricity, gas or mains drainage. The year 1931 was a significant turning point both for the Martels and for Blackfen.

THOUGHTS

Are you an active member? The kind who would be missed?
Or are you just contented that your name is on the list?
Do you attend the meetings and mingle with the flock?
Or do you stay at home to criticise and knock?
Do you take an extra part to help the work along?
Or are you satisfied to only just belong?
When business comes around do you pretend you're sick
And leave the work to just a few then talk about the clique?
Think this over member, you know right from wrong.
Are you an active member, or do you just belong?

(The above was handed to me by a committee member! Ed.)

THE LORD ASHCROFT GALLERY AT THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

by Frances Percival

The 16th January 2011 edition of the Sunday Telegraph included a supplement '50 GREAT HEROES'. It is a work written and compiled by Lord Ashcroft, KCMG of the Victoria Cross and George Cross medals that he now possesses and in turn these medals are now on display at the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum. The Gallery was opened by HRH the Princess Royal on Remembrance Sunday last year and now his collection worth £5 million marries up with those already held by the Museum. The name of the exhibition, which is free justly, deserves the title 'THE EXTRAORDINARY HEROES'.

In the supplement, Lord Ashcroft features heroes winning both VCs and GCs from 1855 to 2009 - the last being the intrepid Olaf Schmid of the Royal Logistics Corps.

On page D5, for 1898, we have Captain Hore-Ruthven, VC who later became the Governor General of Australia, for 1899, Charles Fitzclarence, VC and for 1914, FRANK GODLEY.



We remember him being part of our own local history and was the reason why the article particularly sprang out at me. He was the first private to be awarded the VC during the First World War for heroism defending Nimy Bridge. For two hours he was manning a machine gun with Lieut Dease who was killed but Godley carried on whilst his comrades were able to retreat. When he ran out of ammunition he destroyed the gun and crawled to a nearby road, later being taken to a Belgian hospital. When this was taken over by the Germans he became a prisoner of war, apparently being well-treated by his captors who sent for skin grafts for his wounds, his back alone requiring 150 stitches. When well enough he was transferred to Doberitz Prison Camp where a senior German officer informed him that he had been awarded the Victoria Cross. He later learned that

Lieut Dease had been awarded a posthumous VC. He was one of those, although injured, able to return to 'Blighty'. His service in the Royal Fusiliers dated from 1909 (well before the outbreak of the First World War) to 1919 when he was discharged. Although he then spent 30 years as a humble school caretaker in the Tower Hamlets area, he was feted and honoured on many occasions. He died in Loughton in 1957 and four memorial plaques have been erected to him. Firstly in East Grinstead where he was born and many Godleys before him. Secondly in Bexley (Sidcup – Frank Godley Court) where he lived in his teenage years. Thirdly, in Tower Hamlets where he spent his working life, and the fourth one in Loughton where he lived and finally died. These communities were obviously proud to own Mr Godley as one of their citizens.

I have used the Internet for the above information and was intrigued that in his younger years it indicated he lived in Bromley. On a page of the Imperial War Museum site it invited me to view the Godley entry of the 1901 census! This sorted out the mystery; the Godley family did live at Ethel Cottages, in the Civil Parish of Footscray, Ecclesiastical Parish of St John, a Rural District of Bromley. This shows the pitfalls of research, that you must be aware of boundary changes and not be put

off by today's named areas. Nevertheless research today, especially for family history, is so much easier and less footslogging than 30 years ago. An interesting visit perhaps could be made to the Imperial War Museum to view this Exhibition and in particular Private Godley's Victoria Cross.

**The Civic Recognition Awards 2010, London Borough of Bexley Council
Meeting 24 February 2010**

Dr John Mercer Nominated by Mr Anthony Thomas

After a lifetime working in education, Dr John Mercer has turned his skills and knowledge to lecturing on the local history of the London Borough of Bexley. John has written books on the subject, including *The Sidcup Story*, which looks at life in Sidcup through the years, including people, places and the area during the Second World War. Any donations John receives are given to charity.

John is a respected member of Bexley Civic Society and a founder member of the Friends of Red House, which is a National Trust property in the borough and the only house commissioned, created and lived in by William Morris. John was also the chairman of Sidcup U3A for 2007/10.

John is an outstanding historian, who gives freely of his time, his knowledge and experience, and he has greatly benefited the community in which he lives and worked. For over 50 years of inspiring local people to learn more about the London Borough of Bexley, Dr John Mercer is recommended for the Civic Recognition of Voluntary Service by Adults Award.

THE ASH CLOUD

By Katherine Harding

It is not often I plan a holiday to a faraway part of the world and end up quite unexpectedly in quite a different corner of the globe but then an obscure Icelandic volcano doesn't often erupt and puff billows of dense smoke over a large part of Europe. How inconsiderate! Like a number of you fortunate or unfortunate enough to travel in April 2010, I found myself at the end of my holiday stranded in Beijing with a deal of uncertainty as to when and how I was going to get home again. Beijing is not the best place to be once you've seen the main sights and the city is covered permanently in a thick pall of oppressive, grey pollution. Almost every vestige of the old China has now been razed and the city could now be any fast moving, high-rise living American city. Quite honestly, my fellow traveller and I wanted to get home as soon as possible (her to work and myself to a new grandchild due shortly). I have to say now that unlike many others, I have no great tale of woe to tell as our tour operator, Wendy Wu (yes, I know it sounds too obvious for a Chinese holiday group but Wendy really exists and her company specialises in trips to China, Vietnam etc) was **marvellous**. Our Chinese rep was immediately pro active on our behalf, arranged for us to stay on indefinitely in our hotel for just 20% of the usual price and cried when she had to leave us to move on to her new group. One aspect of the 'old' China that has not disappeared is the great respect for guests.

However, a combination of not knowing when we could fly home, not having the language to communicate with and having to stay in or near the hotel for an unspecified period of time was just too much for us not to resist the temptation to take up the offer from friends to stay with them in Australia until the situation resolved

itself, hence my end destination being somewhat further from home than I had intended!

It was quite an adventure all in all and who can be downhearted when a 10 day Australian holiday is suddenly on offer with free accommodation?

Footnote: Despite earlier comments, the trip to China was memorable. BA even coughed up a few pounds compensation to offset the rather large final bill! As for Wendy Wu, on our return we received a gift hamper, a personal letter and advice on how to make the successful claim and assurances of reductions on any other holiday. Highly recommended company.

MUSIC IN SIDCUP

by Malcolm Youngs

It is not widely known that Sidcup has a long established orchestra, The Marlowe Ensemble, which tries to keep the flag of light music flying, the sort of cheerful music that used to be heard regularly in concert halls and on bandstands and was a big part of the BBC's music output.

The Marlowe Ensemble was founded in 1960 when three members of the Sidcup Operatic Society who played various instruments began meeting regularly to play together. They were soon joined by other instrumentalists and the group grew into a light orchestra. Its name comes from the fact that some of the early meetings were held at Marlowe Close, Chislehurst. The membership has changed over the years but several of the original members are still there and some of the next generation have taken part.

A large library has been built up ranging from symphonies to music hall songs. Although the orchestra exists mainly for the members to meet and enjoy music making, they have given many public performances at local clubs and churches, particularly at the Holy Redeemer Church in Days Lane with which the orchestra has special ties.

An important and very enjoyable part of the orchestra's activities is an annual Summer Music Week during which some 50 members and friends meet for music making of all kinds in the Holy Redeemer Church Hall for orchestral sessions and in people's homes for chamber music.

Some 12 years ago the Ensemble produced an offspring, the Lamorbey String Orchestra, which meets monthly on Tuesday mornings at Hurst Community Centre. Players of stringed instruments love playing the wide string orchestra repertoire and the orchestra flourishes with some 25 members.

The Marlowe Ensemble now meets on Wednesday evenings at West Lodge School in Station Road, Sidcup and is always pleased to welcome new instrumentalists, especially string players. The conductor, Malcolm Youngs (Tel: 020 8300 1180), would be happy to provide further information about the Ensemble or the String Orchestra.

THE ANNUAL KENT HISTORY FEDERATION CONFERENCE

by Denise Baldwin

The Kent History Federation is an organisation which affiliates history societies, local history societies, civic societies and archaeological societies. On Saturday 8th May 2010 it held its annual conference at Tunbridge Wells, attended by over 80 people including our members, Eric and Frances Percival, John and Olive Mercer, Janet

Cooper and Denise Baldwin. The day was very cold, for May, and wet. The venue was King Charles the Martyr Church, first erected in 1678, which unfortunately was unheated. Interestingly, it had a plaque to Queen Victoria showing where she sat in the church when she visited the town before she became queen.

The conference was opened by the Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, together with a representative of the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, in full regalia. We were then treated to three lectures by members of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society.

The first illustrated talk was by John Cunningham on Tunbridge Wells, the first English tourist centre. Tunbridge Wells did not exist until the 1600s. It started to grow after support by Elizabethan royalty seeking the medicinal benefits of its waters, the popularity enhanced by its proximity to London compared to Bath. Later Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles 1st, who enjoyed spas, became a frequent visitor.

Its reputation grew and with it certain notoriety until the arrival of Beau Nash in the 18th century brought about some order and rules. Its increasing prosperity would have been assured but it fell from grace after Queen Anne withdrew her support when the local council had not repaved the Pantiles with the money she had donated. This fascinating talk was delivered with wit and assurance and certainly enjoyed by all.

After coffee it was the turn of Dr Philip Whitbourn on the Residential Development of Tunbridge Wells, the impact of Decimus Burton. Decimus Burton was born in 1880, a tenth child, I am not sure if all the other children were similarly named! Decimus was a trained architect who worked in local stone and is remembered for work in Regents Park and the Hyde Park Corner Arch. He was commissioned by a local landowner to design an estate in Tunbridge Wells to house the new wealthy middle class that had started to move to the area. This estate of 56 acres, known as the Calverly Estate, consisted of an eclectic mix of designs and included parks and shops much of which still survives. When the railway arrived in 1846 more of these estates were built to designs by a variety of architects and are much sought after today. This again was an interesting illustrated talk.

The last lecture dealt with Tunbridge Ware and was given by Dr Ian Beavis. Originally just simple turned wood souvenirs, these developed by the 1700s into highly decorated forms of marquetry. Dr Beavis illustrated his talk with pictures showing how the tessellated designs were put together and the variety of patterns and designs that could be achieved. By the 1900s Tunbridge Ware began to decline and only a few individual craftsmen continue the craft.

After lunch, groups were taken around to various parts of Tunbridge Wells to look around the town, later returning to the Church hall for tea.

This Conference was well organised, interesting and informative and thanks go to the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society for a good day.

HONEY-ROBBERS and APIARISTS

by Liz Ellicott

Honey-robbing from wild bees has been a part of foraging ever since the first man got a taste of the wonderful liquid gold. Who could resist going back for a second taste, even at the risk of a sting or two? Even today some primitive cultures go to enormous trouble to harvest honey from wild bees; one example of this is the Akie tribe of Northern Tanzania who, on hunting trips, always keep an eye open for the chance of gathering honey from a wild bees nest. Without any protection the hunters take honeycomb from hollow trees and suffer many stings in the process. Some of you may have watched Jimmy Doherty (of TV's Jimmy's Farm fame) harvesting honey

with the Honey Hunters of Nepal, standing on a precarious bamboo ladder up a 60 metre cliff armed with nothing more than 2 poles and a basket.

The first written evidence of apiculture in Britain is in Roman times, but bees had been domesticated for many centuries before that. We know, for instance that the early Druid bards called Britain "The Honey Isle of Beli". Hives, smoking pots, honey extractors and other beekeeping paraphernalia have been found at Knossos. The early Egyptians were also beekeepers, the first official mention being in the First Dynasty (31st-28th century BC) when the title of Honey Sealer is given. In China's Bee Museum at Beijing the first example of the word 'honey' is shown as appearing in the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century BC). Back in Britain written records also exist of beekeeping in Anglo-Saxon and Norman times, and from the early medieval period beekeepers have left evidence of the structures used to house and protect their bees.

I had hoped to find evidence in Domesday of beekeeping in Kent, but unfortunately the number of hives was not recorded in Great Domesday. Little Domesday completed in 1086, which became the final record for East Anglia, records 1159 beehives in the counties of Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. Honey, however, is mentioned as payment 'in kind' worth 1 shilling per sester (*sester sextarium – 32 fl oz or 2 pints*). This payment-in-kind was recorded in the paying of tithes to the church. Tithes could be paid under three categories:

- All things which grew and increased annually e.g. wool, grain, vegetables etc
- All things which were nourished by the ground e.g. lamb, calves, and animal produce like milk, honey, hides etc
- The produce of man's labour, particularly the profits of mills and fishing.

Tithes were also categorized as being Great or Small, honey falling into the Small category as an animal product. Great tithes were paid to the Rector of the parish (often absent from the parish), while Small tithes were paid to the Vicar.

Beekeeping has changed little over the centuries, the main aims staying the same – that is to harvest wax and honey, and to maintain healthy colonies.

The main difference is the beekeepers' attitude towards the phenomenon of swarming. Swarming is the colony's natural way of reproducing; a new queen is raised and the old queen, with several thousand followers, leaves the original hive to set up another colony. Up until the last century swarming was not only expected but encouraged as this was the only way to increase the number of hives, thus increasing the honey harvest. Modern beekeepers do all they can to *prevent* swarming, preferring to keep larger colonies with more space to produce larger harvests of honey. This working against nature can be troublesome and time-consuming, but it has also led to a huge retail and manufacturing industry. The development of suitable 'housing' for bees was dependent on the realisation of two facts: 1. that bees like the dark; and 2. that bees always crawl *upwards*. This made the old-fashioned skep the ideal bee home. Early skeps were probably made of wicker and were taller and more conical than the familiar skep shape of today. More recent ones are made of woven straw.



This picture shows examples of Dutch skeps at a bee market in Holland this year.



Inside a skep

Modern beekeepers, having prevented swarming, must protect their colonies over the winter so they can start honey-production in the spring.

There is a thriving Beekeepers' Association in Kent with a local group – the Ruxley Beekeepers. The British Beekeepers' Association, based at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire, hold a Spring Conference each year offering lectures, activities and retail opportunities. Recent campaigns have resulted in more and more people taking up beekeeping, with national organizations such as the National Trust getting involved. But the two main aims I mentioned earlier still stay the same.


So what are we - honey robbers or apiarists? You decide!

(It was reported in the September 2010 edition of 'France' magazine that some of the iconic buildings of Paris have beehives on their roofs. The most famous beekeeper sells his Paris Opera House Honey at 100 Euros a pot. Editor)

FINALE

by Frances Percival – Editor

I regret to say this is the last time the Newsletter will appear in this format and indeed be edited by myself. It was in 1983 that I had the idea of producing a Newsletter. This first one consisted of two A4 sheets in which I managed to mention so much that was going on at the time. The Newsletter did not become an absolute annual feature due to circumstances but those printed give a good indication of the Society from the initial issue to now. It has been fun requesting members for an article, the horror on their faces, and then the result that was eminently printable. I produced the 1983 one on my old typewriter and now today this one will be sent to the printer with colour photographs inset. Those 27 years have seen such progress in communication and I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of that process.

 Lamorbey
& Sidcup
LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY

Founded 1952

Affiliated to Kent History Federation • Kent Archaeological Society • Bexley Civic Society