

Lockdown News: June 2020

Society News

As we write this newsletter, the lockdown is easing gradually but the Society won't meet again until September at the earliest. We will keep you informed if anything changes. As mentioned last time, subscription renewals will be delayed by the number of meetings missed. If you have any interesting material for the next newsletter, please let us know. Thank you, Jennifer.

The first to step up to the plate is Alan Medley.....

Stagecoaches and Turnpikes by Alan Medley

I'm booked to do a talk about Stagecoaches and Turnpikes next year – if we're back to normal by then. I thought I would offer this little taster in case you're missing our monthly dose of history.

I've always been fascinated by the thought of stagecoaches with teams of horses rushing through Sidcup, just a few yards from where we hold our meetings. If anything my interest increased after the needless destruction of the facade of The Black Horse - one of the few tangible links back to those days.



The route through Sidcup was over the toll road managed by the New Cross Turnpike Trust. Trusts were formed around the country from around 1707, and this one was formed in 1718 to manage and improve the roads through this part of Kent. The Trust had 3 main routes from New Cross Gate, this one on the way to Maidstone, another to Dover through Welling, and the third on the road to Hastings via Bromley.



The busiest of these was the old Dover Road which followed the ancient route of Watling Street from London, via Canterbury, to the coast. There are no photographs of course, but there are some great paintings of stagecoaches on the road including this one by Henry Alken showing the London to Dover mail coach in full flight.

There were up to 50 coaches a day on the Dover road by the early 19th century, including the daily mail coach and regular coaches to Paris via Calais. You can get a real feel for the realities of stagecoach travel in the late 18th century from Charles Dickens's Tale of Two Cities, where he describes the challenges of ascending Shooter's Hill, with the passengers walking alongside in the dark and the mud, and the real



sense of fear when they're approached by a horseman through the darkness.

The Sidcup road was not as busy as the Welling route, but there were 16 coaches or more each day passing through to London, Wrotham, Maidstone, and some on to Folkstone and Hythe. The New Cross Turnpike ended at the Footscray tollbar, and coaches continued onto the Wrotham and Maidstone Turnpike from Ruxley.

Pigot's Guide of 1840 lists the coaches passing through Footscray, with many of them changing horses at the Tiger's Head or the Seven Stars. The Tiger's Head was located just above the present Lidl site and had stables for 50 horses. All those coaches would have passed through Sidcup at up to 10 miles an hour – quite a sight to see I reckon.

The coaching age lasted nearly 200 years and it was the pride of the nation until it was killed off by the railways in the second half of the 19th century. Great days! I'm looking forward to telling you a lot more about the evolution of the roads and stagecoaches of Britain and Kent in my talk next year.

Stay safe. Regards, Alan

Famous People of Sidcup

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the new banners are now in the High Street. A second leaflet to accompany them can be downloaded from the Society website from under the heading 'Famous People of Sidcup'.

The leaflet will be available from Sidcup Library when it finally re-opens.

Bowling Club in Riverside Road?

Denise has had an enquiry recently from Jean Pooley regarding the one-time existence of a 'bowling club' at the end of Riverside Road, just past the Water Board premises. She walked past there recently along the footpath to Bexley village and remembered there being a club hut, but all that is left now is a large metal roller. She is curious to know if there really was a club of sorts there. Please let us know if you have any memory of this.

Foots Cray Meadows

We all know that the meadows are lovely to stroll around but there's more to see if you know where to look. We (Mike Corley and Philip Willson) are developing a guide for members including information about the three old houses and the estates that gave rise to our current wonderful resource – Pikes Place, Foots Cray Place and North Cray Place. The last two are already very well documented but we aim to bring it all together into a guide for members, hopefully later this month.

Pigot's Commercial Directory of Kent 1840 – Foots Cray

The following coaches from Maidstone, call at the Tigers Head, Foots Cray, every day (Sunday excepted), viz. – the *British Queen*, morning at half past eight – the *Reliance*, forenoon at eleven – the *Balloon* every day at twelve – the *Tally* Ho afternoon at one and the *Favourite* evening at six.

To London, the Age (from Farningham), every morning at nine – the Times (from Folkestone), every afternoon at four and an Omnibus (from Maidstone) calls at the Seven Stars, Foots Cray every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning at 11.

To Farningham, the Age (from Londor), calls at the Tigers Head, Foots Cray every evening at half past five.

To Folkestone, the *Times* (from London), calls at the Tigers Head, Foots Cray every morning (Sunday excepted), at a quarter before ten; goes through Maidstone, Charing, Ashford, Hythe and Sandgate

To Maidstone, calling at the Tigers Head, Foots Cray, every day, (Sunday excepted), the *Favourite*, forenoon at a quarter before eleven – the *Reliance* every afternoon at three – the *Tally Ho* at half past three – the *Balloon* at half past four - & the *British Quoon* at a quarter past five – an *Omnibus* (from London), calls at the Seven Stars, Foots Cray, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoon at three and the *Reliance* every Sunday afternoon at a quarter past four.

