

Lockdown News: July 2020

Society News

As we write this newsletter, the lockdown is easing further but the Society still does not plan to meet again until September at the earliest. We are planning a socially-distanced committee meeting sometime this month and any earth-shattering decisions will be relayed in the next newsletter. If you have any interesting material for inclusion in the newsletter, please let us know. Thank you, Jennifer. [REDACTED]

Sidcup News

The former doctors' surgery at 20 Hatherley Road has been converted into 5 flats, 2 on the ground floor, 2 on the first floor and one on the second floor. It certainly looks to have been done to a very high standard. The new name for the building, Crombie House, now appears above the front door and on a stone tablet next to the entrance. The name commemorates Dr James Crombie and his family who lived there from around 1890 to his death in 1918. We have kept the Crombie family informed of progress and they are very pleased to know that their great grandfather has been remembered in this way. (Photos: Philip Willson)



The Times Building, Sidcup by Denise Baldwin

It seems strange that a building I have taken for granted for so many years has recently become more interesting. Developers have moved in and the skeletal building is now surrounded by hoarding hiding all the activity going on behind. This building, known as the Times Building, at the top of Sidcup Hill was part of the Sidcup skyline standing out amongst a mix of Victorian and Edwardian housing. The 1930's design in soft red brick with stone facing gave it a distinctive look and it was built at a time when newspapers were the eyes and ears of the community.

The Sidcup Times started life in 1881 as a small newspaper; it gradually amalgamated with other local papers to become the District Times. I do not know the whereabouts of its first premises but in 1898 the



'District Times' printing works and offices were at 10 Clare Terrace so possibly it started there. Clare Terrace at the top of Sidcup Hill was a row of Victorian shops with accommodation above, most of which are still intact. According to Walsham's 1898 directory these shops consisted of a grocer, confectioner, tailor, ironmonger, watchmaker, dairyman, cycle maker, baker, coffee tavern, hairdresser and the Times. That sounds amazing when you look at it now. Behind

Clare Terrace along Cross Road, you can still see the building where the printing works would have been. At the turn of the century the Sidcup and District Times advertised itself as a high class newspaper, read by all classes of the community and maintained it was 'strictly impartial'.

In the 1930's the District Times acquired land alongside Clare Terrace. On a 1909 Sidcup map this looks to be a field with a glasshouse adjoining Doug Holland's smithy in Cross Road together with a large house called The Grange owned by Mr Tolhurst. The new building was the main office for the newspaper with printing works buildings behind. In the 1930's the Kentish Times had printing offices in Sidcup, Orpington and Dartford and not just for printing newspapers but also adverts, sales notices, bill posting and publishing. It was a big employer with printers, setters, mechanics, reporters, office staff and van drivers.



The Sidcup and Kentish Times prospered with a large circulation reporting good and bad news. Copies of the paper have been microfiched at Bexley Local Studies and they are a great resource for the local historian, giving a picture of local events over the last 100 years. However, change in technology and printing, easier news access, increased expenditure and overheads and to some extent a lack of interest from the local community, meant that sales fell. The works gradually closed and the Times management eventually sold the building around 1999.

Thankfully most of the Kentish Times archives were donated to Bexley Local Studies Archives and our president Malcolm Barr-Hamilton facilitated this. I also thought at this time the building had been locally listed but it appears not. The newspaper now appears to be part of Archant which produces a regional newspaper, magazines and printing and publishing and situated at Roxby House, Station Road.

It is at this point the information becomes hazy. When the Kentish Times left, the building was taken over by Trans-Oceanic Meat Co and renamed Oceanic House. The Trans-Oceanic company's principal activities were wholesale meat and meat products, fresh and frozen and the building was used as their main office. The printing sheds were pulled down and just a few buildings remained. The area was used as a temporary car park.

In 1989 London Borough of Bexley approved a planning application to demolish the building and erect a three to four storey office building with an underground car park. However, this was not carried out and the building stood neglected. In 2018 a block of 48 one to two bedroom flats was approved for the developer Shanley. Looking at the plans it would seem the original building was to be demolished. However, the original building now looks to be preserved and it has been gutted but not demolished. It would be sad if this notable building was to disappear.

In my meanderings through the internet I found two wonderful films which are fascinating. I recommend them to you. They show a piece of Sidcup social history some will remember. One is Kentish Times Chislehurst & Kentish Times, Sidcup, 1948 London Screen Archives. The other is Kentish Times Story (1959-63), produced by Sidcup Film Unit, part of the East Anglian Film Archive. They both show the production of the newspaper and how labour intensive they were. They give an insight into offices and office workers, fashion, street scenes, printing works and vehicles. Something for everyone.....

As a footnote, in 1935 jigsaw puzzles were produced by the Kentish Times showing the building with jubilee decorations. The puzzle was up for sale on the internet.

If any members have anything they can aid to this information, please contact us and let us know.

(Photos: Bexley Archives)

Foots Cray Meadows by Philip Willson

The full guide by Mike Corley and me, which was promised last month, will be a little while longer if it is going to be researched properly. However, here are some notes to get things started.

The meadows are the merger of two large estates, Foots Cray Place and North Cray place. Neither building survives but the ground layout of Foots Cray Place is still visible. North Cray Place was already in a bad state after being bombed in WW2 and its final use as a social club came to an end and it was demolished in the 1960s to be replaced by a housing estate.

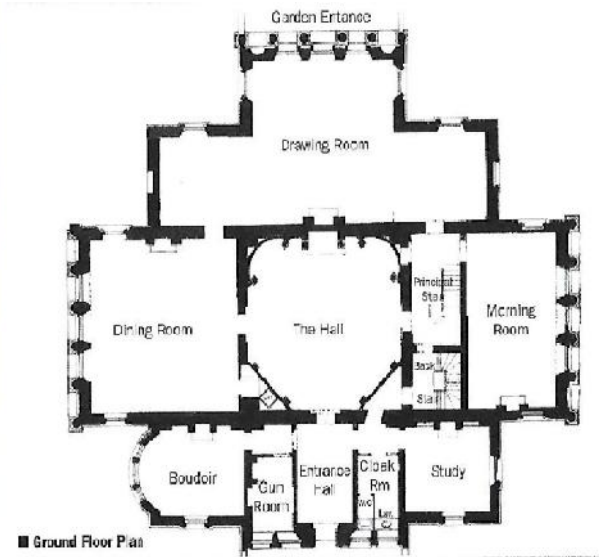
There had been an earlier house, Pikes Place, in the Foots Cray grounds, nearer to All Saints Church and the river, but this was demolished once the new Palladian style mansion had been completed. Again, no real trace survives although there may be tell-tale signs in the ground if you know what you are looking for.

The layout of the meadows can be seen in the picture.



Here we will talk about what remains of Foots Cray Place. Over the last few weeks we have had a long, dry period and this has helped make parts of the old house visible as the grass has died back faster where there are remains of wall bases. These are visible to some extent most of the time, but recent conditions have enhanced the effect.

The next picture is a combination of an overhead shot by Mike Corley and his friend who flew a drone over the site. The plan is from 'The Great Estates' by Oliver Wooller, published by Bexley Council Graphic Studio. Hopefully you can see roughly where everything is. The photograph has been slightly enhanced in order to make the lines more obvious. We plan to visit the site again soon and take a few measurements.



The house was destroyed by fire in 1949 and the decision was made to demolish it, at least that part above the ground. The cellars are known to survive but the entrance has been sealed.

Still, it's a great place to just go and have a wander around to see what is still there. There are the remains of two of the external stairways down to the avenue of trees that lead towards the river. The steps are usable but please be careful as they are hardly in prime condition.

I would like to think that, if the fire had taken place more recently, Foots Cray Place could have been restored. Back in 1949 such heritage was disposable and the local council, who were by then the owners, were not focussed on hanging on to the past. How times change.



To finish off, here is a photo showing the remains of North Cray Place as demolition took place.

The most visible parts of this estate that remain are the Capability Brown Five Arch Bridge and the brick wall that surrounds St James Church and continues round into St James Way.

(Credits: Map: Bexley Council. Foots Cray Place fire: Philip Willson. North Cray Place being demolished: Phyllis & Philip Nash collection at Bexley Archives).