

# SIDCUP REMEMBERED

Recollections

of

Old Sidcup



THE BLACK HORSE - 1897

**SIDCUP REMEMBERED : RECOLLECTIONS OF  
OLD SIDCUP**

Following the interest shown in the publication of ' Do You Remember ?' when residents of Blackfen and Halfway Street came to the Blackfen Library in 1990 and talked about their memories of yesteryear, it was decided to produce a similar booklet about Sidcup. So in March 1992 many people came to the Sidcup Library one evening and told their stories to a band of local historians. This is the result. We hope it records accurately what was told to us and that it will be of interest to many people now and in the future.

John Mercer (Editor)

**THANKS FOR THE MEMORY**

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**DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF**

**MRS E.M.BOOKER**

## **MRS BASSETT**

Mrs Bassett lived in Lincoln Road during the First World War. She recalled the post office at the top of Sidcup Hill run by a Mrs Cole and a Robinson's cafe nearby. Her father, Mr Fenning, worked at 'The Grange', a large house where Old Forge Way now stands. The owner, a Mr Tolhurst, was a diamond merchant and Mrs Bassett remembers going there with her father and sorting out sapphires on the kitchen table. The Strawberry carts used to come up the hill from Swanley bound for market and the smell was delicious. When she was very young the carters would throw her apples from their cart. In those days Foots Cray was more important than Sidcup. The water trough at the bottom of Sidcup Hill which was provided for the horses before the climb has now gone. Mrs Bassett remembers some of the characters that used to be found in the district. There was Whistling Rufus, North Cray Kate and Smokey Joe. Two early memories were the Christmas lights in the gardens of the big houses in Carlton Road and the carriage outside 'Savernake'. In later years Mrs Bassett worked at the Home and Colonial in Sidcup High Street and during the Second World War she was manageress of Goodworth's.

## **MR FRED COCKERTON**

Mr and Mrs Cockerton began their married life in Catford. They moved to Swanley and then to Sidcup which they thought was a more pleasant place. They sold their house and bought a maisonette on a very long lease in Birkbeck Road for £3950 and were pleased to get it. Mr Cockerton was 'in the print' all his working life as a compositor. He worked on the 'Sunday Telegraph' for a while when they brought out nine editions on a Saturday night. Later he worked on 'The Kentish Times' when it

was produced in Sidcup on a rotary press. The setting up was done in Sidcup and the negatives were sent to an Uxbridge firm who made the curved printing plates which were sent back to Sidcup to be fitted to the press. There have been noticeable changes in Birkbeck Road even in thirty years. Many of the front gardens have been paved over to provide car parking space. The Cottage Hospital was demolished and replaced by the Health Centre. The old Birkbeck School has become a private ballet school. Once there was a printer's on the corner opposite the school. In the High Street was a fish shop (MacFisheries) which had the traditional marble slabs for displaying the fish and bloaters hung upon a pole outside the shop. This has now become an Oxfam charity shop. In Birkbeck Road Mr Cockerton has a slight recollection of a 'Chinese' laundry, the shop of 'Bill the Barber' and of a brass band marching up and down the road, but whom they were or what the occasion was he cannot recall.

## **MR E J AND MRS P CROWHURST**

Mr Crowhurst was born at 'The Crays' 98, Sidcup Hill, the home of his maternal grandmother which was run as a nursing home by two of his mother's sisters. At the time his parents lived in Hatherley Road but somewhere about that time (1920) his father bought a house in Durham Road where Mr Crowhurst grew up with his two brothers and his sister. They all began school at Oxford Road. He recalls the names of many of the teachers and pupils of those times. On his way to school there was a shop on each road corner. There was Collins the newsagents on the corner of Lincoln Road, and Ellcombe the greengrocer opposite. Bill Hollins had a sweet shop on the corner of Sussex Road and in Sussex Road itself was Billie Andrews baker : hot loaves straight from the oven! Warwick

Road possessed a small lock-up shop, a butchers and next door lived Harold Petman, a builder. He kept a herd of Jersey cows at Twysdens, now the site of Schweppes. On the corner of Oxford Road with Warwick Road was a general store and sub-post office. As children they spent a good deal of time visiting grandmother who used to sit in the front window of 'The Crays' watching the world go by. Opposite 'The Crays' were allotments where there are now houses, and towards the bottom of Sidcup Hill there was a big house on either side of the road, each surrounded by a high fence with a gate and having a bellpull to some remote bell. At the top of the hill was the office of the 'Kentish Times' then owned by the Bassett family who lived at 96, Sidcup Hill, next to 'The Crays'. Also at the top of the hill but on the opposite side to the newspaper office was Robins' Stores a general grocer's with a store next door. Mr Hughes was the shop manager and he used to call on Mr Crowhurst's mother for orders and deliver the goods the same day. Earlier the store had been a cinema and the ornamental facade could still be seen. Mr T S Robins had his offices across the road and Mr Crowhurst recalls that he was a 'big wheel' on the local council. Between Robins' Stores and Church Avenue was a nursery owned by a Mr Green. He was a member of the local fire brigade and when the maroon went off he set off on his old motor cycle. There was a fire alarm post at the corner of Durham Road where the glass had to be broken and the handle pulled. There were not many telephones about then.

### **MRS MARY CULLEY**

I was born in All Hallows in 1905 and used to spend holidays with relatives in Sidcup when I was a girl. On leaving school I came again to Sidcup at the age of fifteen to go into service. I first worked for a family in Manor Road and then later obtained a

post as cook-general with Mr Austwick, a solicitor, and his family on the corner of Crescent Road in the house now occupied by the Doreen Bird School of Dancing. They still have the same brass door furniture that I used to polish daily. They had one son who attended the boys private school as a boarder in what is now Sidcup Place - the house now used as Council Offices. One of the things he liked to do was to sit in the large clothes basket and then I and the other maid had to carry him all the way up numerous stairs to his bedroom. The girls in the family always looked forward to Easter, because I would take them to Miss Popplewell's shop in the High Street, where they would each choose a new straw hat, decorated with small artificial flowers. These were proudly worn to church on Easter Sunday.

Sidcup was vastly different then. Many farms, hop fields and open spaces and far more variety of shops in the High Street. Miss Popplewell's in the centre of the High Street was a fascinating shop run by two sisters. It was a haberdasher's - selling all types of household linen, ladies' underwear, and millinery. They had everything in boxes but knew exactly what they had and where to locate it.

I met my husband Bob Culley who was a milkman in the early twenties. His family lived in Nelson Place. When we married we had rooms in a house in Woodside Road. Our first two children - Margaret and Reginald were born there. It was very cramped and we had to look for somewhere else to live. One evening when Bob was in the Ex-Service Men's Club in Main Road, he was talking to a Frank Bird who told him that the Council had built houses in Ellison Road for people to rent. He said he would get our name on the list and Bob said if we did not get something soon he would write to the local paper because then, as now, strangers were moving into the district and being

housed. We were told that as soon as the houses were built we would be allocated one and eventually moved in 1931 into 29 Ellison Road, where our two daughters Kathleen and Evelyn were born. Unfortunately we lost Margaret in a diphtheria epidemic in the early forties. This house was destroyed by a doodle bug in 1944 and we were later rehoused in my present address 7 Ellison Road.

When Bob went out on the milkround my children used to like to go with him to help during the holidays and at week-ends. Evelyn recalls how she used to watch her father put snow studs on the horses shoes to help them through the snow and ice. In Birkbeck Road he would sometimes put a rope round the children's waists, which would then be attached to a milk crate filled with milk bottles. They enjoyed pulling the crate through the snow to deliver milk to the customers, on those occasions when the snow was too deep for the horse to get through with the cart up the side roads, such as Birkbeck Road. We also had a dog and he would follow my husband who went to work on his cycle - sometimes as far as Orpington- then Bob would have to bring him back on the cart. In the early days the milkmen delivered twice a day, starting out ready for the first round in the early hours of the morning.

Bob was also a member of the Home Guard in the second world war. In the 1914 War he was a member of the Royal Horse Artillery, and also a member of their Display Team with the horses.

I became a member of Holy Redeemer Church soon after it was built in 1936 and later was asked to take charge of the Tea Committee. I spent many happy years with this task and have many good memories of the various people I met through the

Church. When I retired at the age of eighty they gave me a lovely party and I had a headline in the Sidcup and Kentish Times - Mary Culley takes a "Well Urned Rest".

My son and daughter live locally and I am a proud grandmother and also great grandmother to five great grandchildren, including twins. My elder daughter lives in the Midlands but she visits when she is able.

I have traced my husbands' family back as far as 1863. I think they originally came from Diss in Norfolk.

#### **MRS ADELAIDE DIWELL**

Mrs Diwell was born in Rotherhithe but came to live in Sidcup in 1931. She knew Sidcup already as her aunt lived there. The family moved to 88 Longlands Road (later renumbered 121) which had been a farm house. Her father was a long distance haulage driver who worked for Arnetts in the Old Kent Road. He used to travel into London by bus. Later he worked for Texaco and used to cycle to Dagenham. Mrs Diwell began school at Longlands School and later transferred to the Central School in Alma Road. When she started work it was with a hairdresser in Hadlow Road. She did not like the work and left after six months. It was her father's idea to work in hairdressing, not her own. She then worked in London for the Performing Rights Society until 1939. She earned £1 a week to start with but her return workman's fare was only eight pence a day. During the war she worked for Johnson and Phillips at the Lamorbey Hotel for Mr Shephard, a director of the firm who moved the office staff to the hotel as a wartime measure. There she met her husband. He was called up into the Rifle Brigade and served in the 14th Army in Burma. In her younger days she

recalls looking out of the Longlands Road window across fields as far as Wingfield Place (now demolished) in Halfway Street. There were no houses between them then. Mrs Diwell remembers some of the local shops and the shopkeepers. The Miss Roadnights kept the chemist shop in Station Road. They were Plymouth Brethren and they used to question her about Sunday observance. One had pure white hair. They were stiff and starchy ladies but kind at heart. Where Unwins is now was once a toy shop: a South African lady kept it. Stangers was a drapers with overhead money wires to the cash desk. As a child she was fascinated with the way the containers would wing their way to the cashier and be returned to the assistant with change and the receipted bill. At the corner of St. John's Parade was a cafe, called Henelenes, in which a large Greek man would welcome you to a table. Next was Carter's a sweetshop (as it still is). There was a butcher's shop, Chalk and Cox, where animals were slaughtered out in the back and opposite a new Woolworth's was built in 1934/35 displacing Martin's Bank.

### **MRS JOAN EVANS AND MR D IVOR EVANS**

Mrs Evans moved to Sidcup from Streatham Hill with her mother in 1933 when her father died. At first they lived in a cottage beside Penhill House where there was no electricity nor gas and cooking was done on a primus stove. Very soon they moved into 'Ellerslie', a large house in Highview Road, to look after a teenage cousin of Mrs Evans. His father had gone to the United States to teach and it was a convenient family arrangement to give up the primitive cottage and move to the house. Her other uncle, F Matthias Alexander, lived in Penhill House and ran a school to teach the educational technique that he had developed and to which he had given his name. It was he who had invited the bereaved family to come to Penhill and to help him in his

teaching which was primarily with physically handicapped and maladjusted children. The Alexander technique has continued to be taught and is today one of the numerous alternative therapies available to the public.

The house at Penhill has gone but the cottage remains on the corner of Penhill Road and Harcourt Avenue, considerably altered and renovated. Mrs Evans recalls with pleasure the more spacious days between 1934 and 1939 when there were many big houses in Sidcup and there were many parties. At week-ends there were often tennis parties in the afternoon and evening parties organised by the sporting clubs and by the Red Cross and the local regiments. From 'Ellerslie' (now replaced by a block of flats) her mother would send her into the High Street, 'just pop into the village' through the garden into St. John's Road and Craybrooke Road near the wood where her present home now stands. Mrs Evans joined the Red Cross and during the crisis leading up to the outbreak of war, she, like many others, gave more and more time to learning the skills of nursing. In 1937/38 she went to camp with the Territorials in Essex and provided a first-aid tent. There were several notable women in Sidcup who provided the training and leadership for the Red Cross volunteers. These included the wife of Dr Barnard. Eventually Mrs Evans went into the naval VAD service in 1940, and was stationed at Chatham, in Golden Square, London and in Leeds. She married D Ivor Evans in 1942 from 'Ellerslie'.

D Ivor Evans lived his early life in New Eltham and attended Merton Court School in Knoll Road ( He remembered the late Beverley Nunns as being there several classes below him). The Headmaster at the time was the Rev T A Lord. Some of the teachers he remembered were Mr Southern, Mr Macdonald and a Miss Marshall (later Mrs Crick). One master called Ferris was

from there to the forge daily. When times were hard he would sharpen the pickaxes of the roadmen. In those days there were no less than nine blacksmiths in the area of N W Kent. He held the forge for a peppercorn rent from the Kentish Times. Earlier the land had belonged to the church and there were two cottages whose height was so small that the postman could hand the letters to the occupier at an upstairs window ! Doug Holland was awarded the RSPCA Medal for rescuing a horse belonging to Cockerell the coal merchant. This horse bolted and had impaled itself on some iron railings. The "smithie" lifted him off and stitched up his torn belly. His daughter, Mrs Franklin, was proud to take this medal to school on those occasions when the children were encouraged to bring something to show the class. The forge was the first building in Sidcup to be hit by a high explosive bomb in 1940, and the last to be damaged by a rocket in March 1945, when the Craybrook works of Thomas Knight were destroyed. Mrs Franklin recalls that a policeman came to the house to tell her father of the 1940 bomb. When the forge was reached it was seen that the anvil had been blown into Dr Fulford's on Sidcup Hill, and that a pyramid of horse shoes had been twisted into a strange shape. Mr Holland received letters from people all over the world concerned over the war damage incurred. When he retired from the forge he took over the "Horse and Groom" : an appropriate title for him! His daughter tells how he loved his Rudge motor-cycle and then his bull-nosed Morris. During the working day he would be dressed in his leather apron but at the week-end he would become a man-about-town with spats and a gold-topped cane. At one time he organised boxing contests in the Kings Hall, and once had Tommy Farr sparring there.

Mrs Franklin recalls with pleasure her time spent at St Gertrudes School for Young Ladies in Hatherley Road. In this sister

school to St Joseph's she received a good education. There was a strong smell of polish as the desks were polished by the pupils every Friday afternoon. The sisters wore big habits and she remembers how some of them hoisted up long skirts with safety pins when working in the garden. They grew their own vegetables in war times. Sister Mary was the Mother Superior. Sister Denise was the geography teacher, Sister Renee taught needlework, Sister Marie was her form teacher and Sister Emmanuel taught the little boys. The girls were encouraged to play tennis and learnt P.E., but shorts were not allowed. There was no talking to boys! Not all the teachers were nuns, but all were strict and also lovely. There was a high standard of needlework. The pupils made their own blouses, by hand. They wrote in copy books but only having first learnt to copy over the letters with dry pens. Mrs Franklin was not a Roman Catholic and did not have to attend St. Lawrence's every day. But she liked joining on the end of the crocodile and liked to dip her fingers in the holy water. She regularly attended the old girls day until the school closed.

### **MR ROBERT GREGORY**

Mr Gregory was born in 11 Clarence Road. His father worked at the Woolwich Arsenal and suffered a serious accident when his cycle was trapped in the tram lines. He spent the rest of his life in a wheel chair. He died when his son was only five years old.

Robert Gregory attended Birkbeck Road School and then transferred to the Central School in Alma Road. He remembered Mr Law the carpentry teacher, who is still living. When he left school he worked for three weeks at the Maypole grocer's for 12/6d a week. When he saw "Smart Lad Wanted" at David Greig's he applied for the job and got it for 15/- a



week. After a while he worked for Willimott's, the shoe repairer, and drove the van. He also learned to mend boots for the soldiers in the Royal Army Pay Corps in Foots Cray - sole, heel, toe plates and studs. He entered the Royal Air Force for six years during the war, serving in the Middle East, Cyprus, Egypt and Greece. He was taken prisoner in Greece and held under bad conditions for eight weeks until an exchange of prisoners was arranged. Once home and discharged he became a van driver again then a driving instructor, finally working as a machine manager at the Kentish Times until his retirement.

One of his earliest jobs was cleaning the medicine bottles for the Miss Roadnights. He recalls Miss Popplewell and her goods all wrapped in parcels and how Miss Popplewell always knew just where everything was in spite of the apparent jumble to the customer. He remembers the muffin man coming around on Sunday and ringing his bell. He remembers Mr Dabin, who sold cockles and mussels from his barrow. There were many grocers' shops in Sidcup High Street when he was a lad and all of them delivered to the door.

### MRS JEAN HAMILL

Mrs Hamill was born in Catford but her maternal grandmother, Grannie Cowdray, lived in Sidcup at "Ravenshoe", The Park. This was a large house later demolished to make way for a block of flats given the same name. As a child Mrs Hamill lived in Green Lanes, Eltham, and recalls cycling to Beaverwood School along the Sidcup By-pass, escorted first by her mother and later by an older schoolgirl, as the road was considered dangerous on account of the traffic. Later she moved with her parents to Priestlands Park Road and remembers vividly the dropping of a landmine by parachute on to Evans Nurseries. She had popped

out of the Anderson shelter to enter the house on a brief visit, when upon her return, she heard the explosion and saw a huge orange flame lighting up the night sky. The garden was littered with broken glass, slates, pieces of wood from trees and ugly bits of shrapnel. Fortunately no one was hurt but the nurseries were destroyed. She remembers playing tennis in The Crescent and watching the dog-fights and the many vapour trails during the Battle of Britain. A dentist, living in a house where the video shop stands at the corner of Elm Road and the High Street, used to run her home from the tennis club in his old, but very distinguished Rolls-Royce.



SIDCUP BY-PASS - 1935

On leaving school Mrs Hamill put her name down for the Land Army, but having a history of bronchitis, she was not accepted. She attended the Art School in Grassington Road for four years and went on to Reading University to complete the ATD (Art Teachers' Diploma). She had earlier won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art but was unable to go there because of the war. Having met her future husband while teaching in Farnham, she returned to Sidcup to be married in St. Lawrence's Church in 1944. Housing being difficult and Bernard being away in the war, they set up home with her mother, now living in Hatherley Road. Many a night was spent in a deck-chair in the cellar of their house as the doodle-bugs (VI's) stuttered over. Thanks to the generosity of her mother-in-law they were able to move into Elm Road where they live to this day.

Mrs Hamill recalls the high hedge around the green in The Crescent and the farm in Sydney Road. This was just a cart track and there was a turnip field to her left as she came home from Beaverwood School and into Main Road. She remembers the Old Forge and taking her young son, David, to see the "smithie" at work and to look at the geese and ducks on the pond in Rectory Lane where now stand the modern Georgian style houses. She remembers her mother telling her about by-gone Sidcup. Grannie Cowdray used to send her mother into the "village" for sixpenny worth of salad, and that was for a considerable family. Uncle Cowdray became Archbishop of Southwark. As a little boy he used to cycle up and down The Park. Her mother used to tell of the horses being flogged to get up Sidcup Hill in snowy weather and how she felt for them. Mrs Hamill's father was one of eight and lived in a farm house at the end of Beaverwood Road. He attended Sidcup Hill School which occupied Sidcup Place and he used to meet his future wife as she came out of the High School in Station Road (now the

Music Centre) and carry her books for her to her home in The Park. Mrs Hamill has seen many changes in Sidcup but the thing she regrets most is the cutting down of a magnificent beech tree that stood in the former garden of Dr Shapley behind her present house. It was cut down to make way for the municipal car park. As her former neighbours, the Eleys once said, "Sidcup has never been the same since the days of the horse tram!".

### **MRS MARION HOCKLEY (nee Shean)**

Mrs Hockley has memories of Sidcup that go back more than eighty five years. She was born in Charlton but moved to 18 Nelson Road with her mother in 1907. They lived in grandmother's house which is now pulled down (though Mrs Hockley still has the key, letter box and knocker in her possession). She remembers the lamplighter coming around and courting his young lady as he went. She recalls the first motor car in Sidcup, owned by Mr Dewey, who kept the music shop in the High Street. It had a tonneau and he used to give the children rides. The first 21 bus was called the Tatcho because it had an advertisement for hair treatment of that name on the front. Her cousin worked in the Post Office as a telegraph boy. He had to learn to ride a bicycle in order to get the job. Her mother used to be the cleaner. The sorting office was at the back of the existing Post Office in the High Street and Mrs Hockley can remember swinging on the stools that went under the sorters' seats while her mother was working there. She remembers Eltham before the trams came. There used to be horse drawn brakes stationed in Court Yard that carried people from Well Hall to Woolwich Market. The floor of the brake was covered with straw for the passengers to sit on for comfort. On Sunday she and her mother would go to Woolwich from Nelson Road to

see the military church parade, and then walk back again. She remembers the fruit fields to the north of the village, stretching to Blackfen and beyond. When the commercial picking was over she and her mother would go and pick fruit that was left over. They liked to collect wild flowers too, and were quite experts in identifying them. Mrs Hockley has seen the changes in lighting in the home from oil lamp to fish tail gas, and from gas mantle to electricity.

She started school at the National School in Birkbeck Road. Mr Reuben Ashton was the headmaster. There was Mrs Ashton, too, who taught there, and Miss Early who was a martinet. Miss Button, who taught the youngest children was a lovely person, with a figure like a rolling pin! Each morning she would put up on a slate the quarters of the moon and time of the tides. Mrs Hockley still does not understand why she did this as the children were too young to understand the meaning. From Birkbeck Road Mrs Hockley went to St. Joseph's Convent in Hatherley Road. Her education there was an open sesame to her. She left at the age of 15 and began work as a filing clerk at Vickers in Crayford. She was never out of work. The job she enjoyed most was in advertising for a London firm in which she was employed in costing and accountancy. She worked until she was 65, travelling up on the train each day. She married twice. Her second husband was a carpenter from Bermondsey. He was killed near Arnhem in the Second World War as he was driving a jeep carrying press correspondents.

### **MISS ENA & MISS MYRA KELLAWAY**

Their family moved to 82 High Street from the Isle of Wight just before the 1914-18 war. Myra was born in Sidcup where Cardy's shop used to be and both girls attended Sidcup Hill

School. They remembered how stern and fierce Mr Sonderburg, the headmaster, was. Myra attended the old Sidcup Grammar School in Station Road and moved with it to the Beaverwood site when she was a senior. Mr Kellaway was a professional photographer who had show cases built in front of the High Street house, and a studio in the back garden. The neighbours were Dr Wood and Mr Cornwall, the dentist. An early memory was the sound of many horses and carts wending their way past the house early in the morning destined for Covent Garden and loaded with farm produce. The noise of the metalled hoofs and wheels always awoke visitors with some alarm. The main farms then were Neal's at St. Mary Cray growing fruit and hops and Vinson's in Halfway Street and also in Swanley. In the early 1930's the house opposite the King's Hall were put up for sale to be replaced by shops (where they lived at No 82 became Cardy's and now a general household shop). The old King's Hall was converted into a cinema and the first film shown there was "Thark" starring Ralph Lynn and Tom Walls.

Mr and Mrs Kellaway moved to No 1 Hadlow Road (where their daughters still live). Mr Kellaway continued his photographic practice, again putting show cases outside the house and building a garden studio. Ena devoted herself to helping her father and Myra Kellaway became a school teacher, having trained at Avery Hill College and retiring as deputy head from Upton Road Primary School in Bexleyheath.

They remembered that 1 Hadlow Road was the first house to be built in Hadlow Road opposite the Old Hadlow House which later became the Sidcup Library. The first library was upstairs above the shop at the corner of Hatherley Road, where Vino Vita is now to be found. From the drive beside their new house access

was obtained to Martins Bank House (where Woolworth's now stands) and both the bank manager and the previous owners of the house had a horse and trap and stabling for their accommodation. From Alma Road and The Drive fields swept all the way to Penhill and Danson, growing mostly strawberries and raspberries. A local notable in the inter-war years was "Whistling Rufus" who used to play a penny whistle in the High Street. It was believed that he lodged somewhere in Bexleyheath. Mr Kellaway took a photograph of him and enlarged it. This and others of Old Sidcup are now lodged in the Local Studies Section at Hall Place. Some of the shopkeepers were characters in themselves. Talbot the butcher, opposite their High Street house was well patronised by the residents. He used to have a great display of meat and poultry hanging up outside his shop and at Christmas time the sight was most impressive. Miss Popplewell who kept a draper's was "a wonderful old lady". She kept everything in brown paper parcels tied up with string. If a customer wanted a vest or a pair of stockings she would climb up the steps and pull down the right parcel, undo it and produce the article required. If it was the wrong size she would do up the parcel again, remount the steps, return it to its appointed place and find another. She never minded how long a sale took and she always knew just where everything was. Another sort of shopkeeper was Harry Morris. He kept a ladies' outfitters on the same side as Miss Popplewell. As soon as a customer entered he would get her a chair and try to persuade the customer to buy more than she had come in for. He became such an embarrassment to some that they would never enter the shop again! Gadsby's (now Contessa) was formerly Cavendish's, This was a big shop, almost as big as Dawson's which stood opposite across the road.

Many of the old cottages as well as the bigger houses have been swept away by modern development. There were small cottages in Nelson Place where the car park behind Iceland and Macdonalds is now. In one of them lived the village sweep. There were one or two cottages behind their house in Hadlow Road. All were swept away when Woolworth's was built.

Myra narrowly escaped death when the rocket fell on Shepherd's Garage and Dairy on March 25th 1945. She was getting ready to cycle to her school along Bexley Lane when it fell killing the woman who worked in the dairy and several more people who lived in Craybrooke Road. Her cycle ride would have taken her past where the rocket landed, had she been a few minutes later leaving home.

The two sisters look back on their earlier Sidcup years with pleasure. They have photographs of amateur stage shows put on at the King's Hall. The only thing that has not changed in Sidcup is the Black Horse!

## JOHN KNIGHT

John Knight, son of Archie Knight, one of the family of Sidcup builders over several generations, was born in Hatherley Road in one of the houses called "The Old Ladies" which at the time was a maternity home. His home was in Craybrooke Road, in a house which his grandfather had built and in which his mother still lives.

John went to Sidcup Hill Primary School as did his father before him and his aunt, Hilda. When John started at the school his father had told him that his aunt's name was inscribed on an

honours board in the hall. John could not locate this until one day when he was acting as milk monitor he opened a cupboard to obtain beakers and saw that the cupboard was made from the old honours board and the name "Hilda" was clearly visible on the cupboard side. John went on to Alma Road Secondary School in 1951 and his first classroom overlooked the coal yard of Harry Gower. There was a teacher there, known as "Knacker" Clark, who had taught him and his father at Sidcup Hill Primary School. He taught science and was widely liked and respected. His father recalls that Mr Clark was invalided out of the army in 1917 with a bullet in the mouth. He had an early crystal set and Archie Knight used to be sent to the wash house where the set was kept to try to locate transmissions. "Knacker" Clark retired in 1954. The origin of his nickname is unknown.

John Knight recalls steam threshing in the field behind the Conservative Club in Oxford Road during the late 1940's. Another war time memory was the devastation inflicted by the V2 rocket that fell on Thomas Knight's premises in March 1945. He was staying at his maternal grandmother's house in Clarence Crescent when the rocket fell. When he and his grandmother raced to see what had happened to their own house in Craybrooke Road, he recalls that the telegraph pole on the bend of that road was still spinning round from the blast. A lock was blown through the door into the kitchen where it shattered a tile and lay on the draining board. The Manners Dairy was wrecked and the shopkeeper killed. John recalls how he used to step down into the cool of the dairy when sent to fetch milk and little groceries. A milk vat from the ruined dairy was blown across the road and later used as a water butt by his father. There were two shops where Rectory Lane enters the High Street. There was Forest's, an off-licence where the patch of grass is now to be found, and Griffin's, the tobacconist, where the rose bed now stands under

the blank wall at the end of Clare Terrace. Opposite, in the vicarage garden was a giant fig tree which dripped fruit onto the narrow pavement and into the road. Where the Invicta Parade is now there were some dank underground air raid shelters.

The family building business was started by John Knight (the grandfather of the contemporary John). He lived in 107 Sidcup Hill, which was demolished some twenty years ago to make room for maisonettes. He built many of the older houses in Sidcup, including those on the other side of Sidcup Hill to 107. His son, Harry Knight, lived at St. Denys in Church Road, and he built houses in Craybrooke Road, in the Longlands area and at the top end of St. John's Road. There was also Joe and Fred Knight, brothers to Harry (all three children of John Knight), and they built in Longlands Road and in St. John's Road. An interesting piece of information concerns a bungalow in Craybrooke Road which was once the garage of a big property in Highview Road owned by H Robinson Cleaver, the famous cinema organist of the 1930's and 40's. He had an organ in the garden where he would play and rehearse his cinema repertoire.

APPENDIX: Sidcup houses built by Harry Knight and his generation

76-86 Longlands Road  
13-27 Craybrooke Road  
36-46 Christchurch Road  
12-18 St. John's Road  
32-32a Craybrooke Road

## MRS BETTY MARTYN

Mrs Martyn was born in Blackhorse Road and has lived in Sidcup for 66 years. She attended Birkbeck Road School and then went on to Alma Road School. She remembers the fields that used to lie behind the secondary school and the walks to Bexley across the fields. When the 'new road' was built to by-pass Sidcup, she recalls sitting on the bank and watching the traffic go by. Her father, Mr Belsham, rang the bells at St. John's Church for many years. There was a Sunday School outing every year by special train from Sidcup to Margate. Her mother was the first caretaker of the Art School in Grassington Road. The area behind the Green was the golf course before it was moved to Hurst Road. There was a working farm in Watery Lane behind Frogal House. Frogal had an ice house where now the maternity wing stands. When the old Queen Mary's was opened as a general hospital in 1929, the officiant was the Princess Royal and Mrs Martyn presented her with a bouquet. Open top buses used to run from the Black Horse yard to London Bridge (No 21). She and other children were fascinated with and a little fearful of the slaughter house belonging to Chalk and Cox which lay against Back Road. The children used to try and look through the fence at the animals. One local celebrity whom she recalls was a Mr Jackson of Hadlow Road who became a centenarian. There is a seat in Sidcup Place which bears a plaque in his memory. It says that he was in his 101st year when he died on the 21st June 1934.



BELMONT COTTAGE - THE GREEN - 1944

## MISS EMILY NORRIS

Miss Norris was born in Southwark, but as her father was a policeman she moved away from the area to Somerset. Her mother, wanting to move back to London, was found a house through an uncle and moved to the present house in Oxford Road. (On the way the removals van broke down on Salisbury Plain). When Miss Norris arrived, Oxford Road was a cul-de-

sac. There were five shops in the surrounding 'county' roads which were very good. She believes that all the good shops in Sidcup have gone, and that the High Street has lost its character. The well-off people have moved away and their houses have been pulled down or converted. She worked for forty years for the United Dairies and finished as manageress of the branch at Fiveways. Her starting wage was 3/6d per week and even as manageress her pay was poor, being only 25/6d. Miss Norris was a great Girl Guider. She became the Akela of the North Cray Pack and was associated with the 2nd Sidcup Scouts and with the Hollies Cub Pack. She was also the district Cub secretary and Chairman of the Trefoil Guild.

She has pleasant memories of Sidcup. She was in the guard of honour for the Guides when Princess Mary visited the district. She attended the wedding of Miss Waring, daughter of Lord Waring, at St. Margaret's Westminster. Previously she and other Guides had had tea with Miss Waring in Foots Cray Place when the latter became engaged. Lord Waring was a patron of the Scout Movement and often Miss Norris would act as a guide to visitors when Lord Waring gave a garden party at the 'big' house.

#### **MISS MARGERY ROBINSON AND MRS JOYCE WATES (nee Robinson)**

The Miss Robinsons were born on Sidcup Hill where their parents ran a cafe. It was next door to the old Kentish Times office in Clare Terrace. The girls went to Sidcup Hill Primary School in Oxford Road and then on to St. Joseph's Convent. They remembered the Australs' pool and hall in Longlands Road, where dancing and singing were taught and shows put on. The Australs had theatrical friends and on one occasion Googie

Withers came to the hall. An older sister, Irene, played the piano for the film shown in the King's Hall in the days of silent films. Although their elder sister moved away, Margery and Joyce have lived in Sidcup all their lives. They recall riding on the brick trolleys when the by-pass was being built and they remember Smokey Joe and a little old lady in Foots Cray who was also a character. In adult life the two sisters became secretaries. Joyce worked for a London firm of accountants in St. Mary Axe until she married. She had three children: two boys who now live in Dartford and a girl who lives in Halfway Street. Margery had only one job in a shipping office in the City. She had a trip to South Africa on the 'Kenilworth Castle'. During World War Two the roof was blown off their house but fortunately they were not there at the time. During the war holidays had to be taken at home and they would take part in tennis competitions in the park. The changes they most notice in Sidcup are that they no longer know everybody when they go out shopping, and that the empty spaces have been filled and the big houses turned into flats.

#### **MISS LILIAN SOAN**

Miss Soan was born in Bromley, one of four girls and three boys, but moved when she was nine to 144 Main Road, which was a cottage for farm workers. Her father worked for Mr Fisher on Crescent Farm which stretched back to where the by-pass is now and up to Chislehurst Road, before the Roman Catholic Secondary School was built. She and other children of the family used to be sent to bring the cows home from the fields but they were never to make the cows run. The privy was at the bottom of the garden and she was always escorted there as a child. She has happy memories of The Shack, a sweetshop owned by "Auntie Bantam. This lady was fond of children and

Miss Soan would spend some of her three pence pocket money every Saturday on her goods. But some of her money went on buying windfalls from the apple trees in The Crescent. She and the other children were afraid of scrumping and paid for their apples.

Miss Soan attended Longlands School when the headmaster was Mr Morgan. She liked poetry and used to recite it to herself as she walked along the road. It was at age 14 that she left school and went to work at Lamorbey Vicarage to be trained as a housekeeper and a nursemaid. She was paid 3/6d a week, but that included a good meal. She went to her own home every night. Later she went abroad as children's nurse (nanny) for Major Sowerden and his family, of Station Road. Among other places abroad she remembers Singapore.

### **MRS DORIS TAYLOR**

Her maiden name was Lovelock and she was born in Sidcup Hill at Nurse Watkins' with Dr Callender in attendance. She lived in Oxford Road, moved to Crayford Road, then to Hamilton Road and in 1933 to Stanhope Road where her parents lived for the next 50 years. She attended the convent school in Hatherley Road and enjoyed her time there. The nuns were lovely. There was an English mistress called Mrs Brown who lived in Dartford and a Miss Foxwell who belonged to the Foxwell family who had a leather shop in the High Street where now is the dry cleaners next to the Lunn Poly travel agents. Her mother had to pay school fees. Elocution lessons were extra at 2/6 a term. She played tennis with some of the fathers from the boys' school. The girls were not allowed to play with the boys. The girls had to wear uniform consisting of navy blue drill slip reaching to the knees, blazer with black buttons. In winter there was a hat and

in summer a white panama with a navy blue band. Long-sleeved jerseys or cardigans in blue were permitted in the winter. Black stockings were compulsory but seniors could wear light stockings in summer time. If it was not possible to go home for lunch the pupils had to bring a packed lunch or have a school meal at 4/6 per week. Mrs Taylor spent most of her lunch time queuing for goods in short supply, such as biscuits from Woolworth's or fish. Once she won a raffle at school for a banana. It was heaven ! Many children were evacuated but she was not. There were no air raid shelters, so they had to trust in the Lord and take shelter under the staircase when a raid was on. During the war Foots Cray Place was used as the home of HMS Worcester, a training ship. Mrs Taylor thought all the cadets were lovely. She could have fallen in love with any of them. The convent adopted a ship at this time and the pupil's used to go to St. Lawrence's to pray for their sailors, but she found the incense too much for her and used to faint. As a consequence she was barred from attending. At the time she was attending the Baptist Sunday School, but not liking the idea of total immersion for baptism she went back to St. John's, whose Sunday School she had originally attended. In 1944, she left school at 17 and began work in the clerks' department in Sidcup Place where she earned 17/6 a week in the typing pool. At St. John's there were pantomimes devised by Ken Samuels and the Operatic Society was started, in both of which activities Mrs Taylor took part. Rehearsals often took place in "Freeby" the home of Mrs Marjory Mills, who was the operatic pianist. A repertory company would perform at the public hall in Hatherley Road with John Le Mesurier and Cyril Fletcher. This was in 1947 and the hall was always filled.

Her grandfather was the proprietor of F Wright and Son, the undertakers, which began on the corner of Black Horse Road



where Stangers became established. Later the undertaking business was transferred to 64 High Street, where it carried on under the name of Udens. All the wood for the coffins came from Sevenoaks and in those days the coffin had an inner coffin of elm lined with lead which went into the oaken cask. All the hearses were horse drawn. The busiest time was just after the First World War when there was a flu epidemic and there were 8 or 9 calls a day. Her aunt worked at Lamorbey Park when it was a hotel. Dr Wood who lived at 73 Station Road was always being called out to the novelist, Ursula Bloom, when she was staying at the hotel.

### MARY TURNER

Mary Turner has lived in Sidcup all her life, She was born in 9 Elm Road but at the age of 6 weeks moved to her present house in Station Road. In her youth she recalls that the station master knew all the men using the railway by name, and if he saw anyone coming down the road late he would hold up the train. The late Beverley Nunns, who was a rail enthusiast as well as a local historian, told her that there had been talk of building a station at Foots Cray. She remembered Mr Nunns well as he lived in Crescent Road and used to ride a bicycle and never wore a top coat even in the coldest weather. There was an old Mrs White, who had ten children, who sat on the corner at 75 Station Road and sold flowers. She had been widowed in the First World War. When Mrs Turner's parents first moved into the house, they received a visit from the flower lady. She said that the previous owner had allowed her to cut holly for her Christmas wreaths and would they let her do the same. Her request was granted and she continued to cut the Christmas holly until she died. There was a man who brought a pony and cart to the top of Hadlow Road. It had dolls on it which moved slowly

up and down when a penny was put into the slot. Then there was North Cray Kate. Miss Turner's mother who had earlier lived in London said that she had seen Kate in the London parks with lots of paper parcels on her bicycle and with lots of spectacles. When seen in Sidcup she wore riding breeches and lived in a caravan in North Cray. Her end was tragic. The caravan caught fire and she was burnt to death.

Miss Turner recalled the hall house in North Cray, used as the village general store and now moved to the open air museum at Singleton in Sussex. Her father was a great walker and they used to walk to Foots Cray then through the fields where there are now factories, on to Five Arches and Bexley to return by train to Sidcup. She remembers the mother of Mr James Turner (who wrote 'Seven Gardens for Katherine'). She used to ride a sit-up-and-beg bicycle and when she died she left a bon bon basket to Miss Turner's cousin. Her teachers at Longlands she remembers well. Miss Watson taught her how to curtsy. She was killed by a bomb in Chislehurst. Other teachers were Miss Reeves, Miss Hunt, Miss Rouse, Miss Bowers, Mrs Hicks, Mr Shields and Mr Turner. Mrs Josiffe was the cook. At age eight, Miss Turner went to St. Gertrude's Convent. A Mr Tristram and her father used to go otter hunting. She did not know where but it could not have been far away.

Her grandparents came to Footscray in 1890/1 and lived in Kent House together with their six children. Her grandfather retired from his provision business at the age of 40, selling to Robert Barling but a few years later repurchased it. Both he and Mr Catt (hence Catts Corner) were successful business men and supplied produce to the big houses in alternate years. In the 90's there was a bad epidemic of diphtheria and as he was also an undertaker he had to deal with many sad events. He would undress in a hut in the garden, discarding everything to be

fumigated. Sadly his elder daughter, Dorothy, caught the disease and died. There was a large fruit garden at the back of the house where all sorts of exotic fruit were grown. He was the first man to sign on at the police station at the outbreak of the First World War despite the fact that he was very deaf. He died in 1923 and her grandmother then discovered that he had always given buns to the annual children's treat of the Foots Cray Baptist Church and a rocking chair to the annual flower show. He served on the Bromley Board of Guardians. Although a stern man he was always just and if any of his living-in staff offended him he would send them to bed. Her grandmother paid a small lad sixpence a week to chop up all the wooden boxes in which goods were delivered. They were then made into bundles and sold for firewood. Within a year she had saved enough money to buy 'St Malo', one of the double-fronted houses halfway up Sidcup Hill and now demolished. Her grandfather kept many horses. He owned property in Birkbeck Road as well as 'Collingwood House' at the corner of Elm Road and the High Street and other houses. He was also a lay preacher quite often walking many miles on a Sunday. His ashes, with those of his daughters, are in Footscray Churchyard.

There were many characters in Sidcup when she was a child. Mr Austwick, a solicitor, had iron forging as a hobby. He made the gates for Sidcup Place which were removed during the Second World War. She well remembers being kept awake during the hot summer evenings by the sounds of Mr Austwick at work. There was a cottage on the corner of Burnt Oak Lane where lived a very old lady who in the summer would sit in the doorway with a colourful parrot in a cage. The knife grinder, a Mr S Camp, was a colourful character. He had a kind of bicycle on which he sharpened knives. He had very black, curly hair and a spotted handkerchief around his neck.

Miss Turner remembers German prisoners of war digging along the High Street during World War Two. Everyone was warned not to speak to them. On another occasion when with her mother, a German plane passed over so low that they could see the pilot lean out of his cockpit. The plane went on to bomb a school at Lewisham.

### **MRS K W WATSON**

One of Mrs Watson's earliest memories was the return of Frank Godley VC from the First World War. He was given a welcome home concert and she, a seven year old pupil at his old school, Birkbeck Road, had to dance the Maypole on the stage. She and her fellow dancers were overawed by the occasion and consequently went wrong and had to sit down. A happier memory was a visit to the King's Hall (now the Cannon Cinema) when the Sidcup Amateur Dramatic Society put on the ballet 'naila' by Delibes and the dancing and the music was so lovely that she has been hooked on ballet music ever since.

Other early memories were of the brick wall around St. John's Vicarage; Craybrooke House where Mr Pilman lived; The Grange (now Old Forge Way) where her father was coachman to Mr Tolhurst; and the horse drawn carriage owned by Mr Shepherd in which her sister was driven to her wedding with Mrs Watson as bridesmaid. Mrs Watson can still remember the delicious smell of strawberries and raspberries coming from the fruit carts on their way up Sidcup Hill to Covent Garden. There were lovely long family walks through Bloom Woods and out on to St. Pauls Cray Common and Leasons Hill, and there was a special spot where, during her courting days, she and her husband to be would sit and watch the moon rise. She would

have to run all the way home to be in by 10pm and her mother would be waiting at the gate. Often her future husband would get ticked off because they were five minutes late. A very exciting incident was the shooting down of a Zeppelin on the other side of the river during the First World War. Everyone was cheering and clapping!

Mrs Watson has a photographic memory of the shops in the High Street at the time of her youth. These were the shops from the corner of Church Road going along the High Street towards Eltham:-

Ticks, menswear: Hilberts, fruit and vegetables: Hawes, grocery: Plants, newsagents: Richens, butcher: Foxwells, sadlers: Pearce Bros, grocery: Stangers, drapers (with aerial tracks for money to the cash desk): Chuters, bakers: Mence Smith, ironmongers: Dawsons, drapers: Adams, jewellers: Scotch Tea Shop: Sidney Palk, menswear: Chalk & Cox, butchers: Boots, chemist: Wright & Sons, undertakers: David Grieg, grocers: Morris, menswear: Whomes, music: Kate Green, florist: Freeman Hardy and Willis, shoes: Home and Colonial Stores, (Miss Nesbitt's studio at side): Dry-Cleaners: Burton's (Later than these other shops): Dr Woods' house: Fifty-shilling Tailors:

These were the other shops from Barclays Bank going towards the Black Horse:-

Other banks: Readies: King's Hall: Jackson, bakers: Miss Courtney, fancy needlework: Evans, florist: Harveys, butcher: International Stores, Victoria Wines: Morris's, ladies wear: Williams Shoes, (Mr Kemp?-a very good shoe repairer): Sandbrooks, chemist: Sabels, newsagent: Miss Popplewell, ladies wear: Carveth Rowe, books and stationery: Johnson's, dry cleaners: Nethertons, hairdresser: Martins Bank, (Mr

Atkinson, manager): Jarrets, ladies wear: Fletcher and Brown, ironmonger: Hansons, chemist: Cave Austin, grocer: Pearce Bros, fishmonger: Stead and Simpson, shoes: Patullo Higgs, corn merchant: Porters Toys, (later B W Smith, printer): Day and Son, fruit and vegetables (around 1918): Miss Willimot, shoes: Carters menswear, Black Horse (terminal for 21 bus).



SIDCUP HIGH STREET - 1910

Mrs Watson was the youngest of 10 children and has the happiest of childhood and family memories. She wishes that everyone today could say the same. She and her family were very poor by today's standards but still happy and contented.

## MRS MARGARET WHITE

My parents came to Sidcup in 1921 and bought a house in Hatherley Road. This was one of Sidcup's earliest roads having the west side plots developed in 1870. The majority of the houses were detached with large gardens, well planted with fruit trees. It was said that the builder, Mr Hawkins, had a friend who ran a nursery so each plot was generously planted with apple, pear and cherry trees. The road was quiet and particularly nice in the spring when the May trees, planted in the pavement all the way down, were in flower.

We had a large wych elm which gave us children much pleasure with a tree house and a swing. At the side of the house was the stable used in the old days for the horse and carriage, a roomy building with a loft above. The mangers and rings were still on the walls. Large amounts of coal were delivered to the back door and shot down the chute to the cellar below. However the house was far from warm by today's standards; the rooms were large with high ceilings and no central heating. Labour was cheap so we had a nursemaid, maid and gardener. My mother gave her orders at the back door to Robins the grocer. Mr Robins lived in a large house at the top of Birchwood Avenue. He had at least eight grocery stores in Sidcup and the surrounding villages. He was also a generous benefactor to Sidcup and its citizens.

Among our neighbours in Hatherley Road lived Mr Morris and his sister, Miss Morris. They each owned and ran a drapery store in the High Street. Then there was Mr Adams the jeweller, and Dr Callender and Dr Duffet. The High Street was well liked with useful shops. There were at least seven grocery stores, a fishmonger, bakers, shoe shops, drapers, stationers,

florist, corn merchants, hairdressers etc. so when we went up into what we called 'the village' there was nearly enough to satisfy all our needs. At sale times my mother went to Hinds at Eltham, Pynes at New Cross or Chiesmans in Lewisham and came back with quality clothes at very low prices.

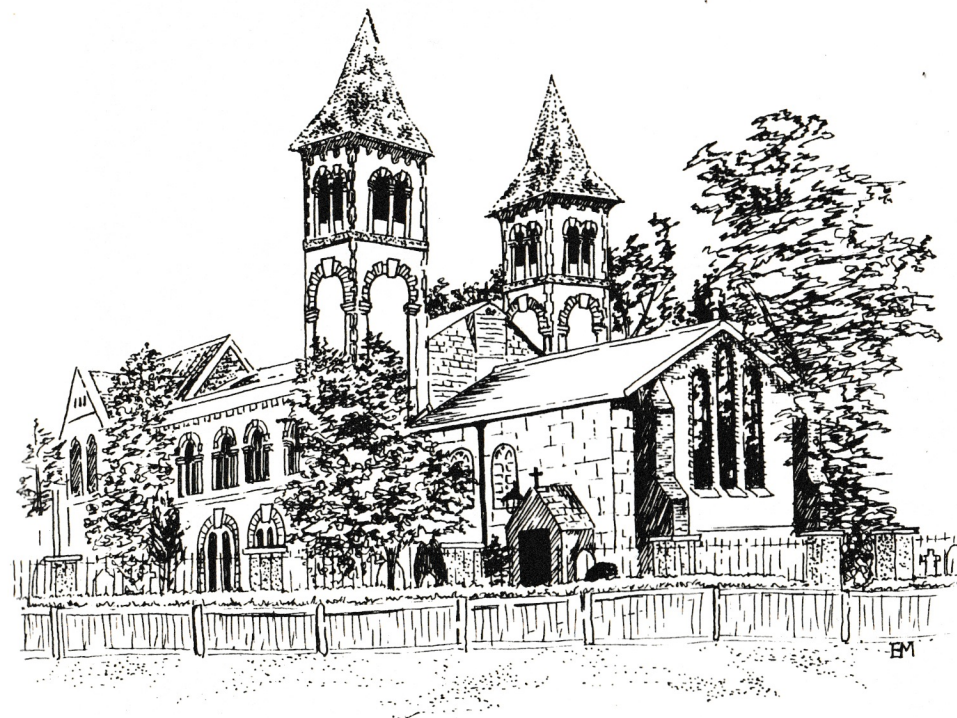
In Hatherley Road we were also served by an excellent fishmonger who used to push his barrow up the road nearly every day. There was also the catsmeat man, the chairmender and the knifegrinder. Smokey Joe must not be forgotten, who struggled up the hill on his ramshackle bicycle, a bucket of smoking coal slung upon the handles. We were rather afraid of him. My brother and I went to school at the Manor House, later used by the Borough for town planning Department. This fine late 18th century building was originally a farm and built in its present form in about 1790. It had many owners over the years and in 1911 the estate was developed and houses were built along the east side of Elm Road, the north side of the Green and later in Grassington Road. It still left large lawns where we played netball and tennis. It was a school from 1911 to 1939. Miss Blofield was the principal when we were there. She bought the Manor House for £250 in 1920! I remember that the rooms were large and the corridors stone flagged. We were not allowed to use the front staircase so had to use the dark, narrow back stairs. However we did use the drawing room for lessons on the grand piano. This was on the left of the front door about where the front office of the Planning Department was located. After school we would go to the fields behind the Green to fish in two ponds for our annual collection of frog spawn. Many a jam jar was broken or sank in the effort. We never met any undesirable characters and there was never any fear that we would. On we would go into St. John's Church and wander up and down the aisles. Being our nearest church it played quite a

large part in our schooling and we had frequent visits from Canon Spurgin who lived in the vicarage, which is where St. John's Parade stands now. Finally we would wander home through a quiet High Street. There was little traffic so few problems in crossing the road.

At the other end of the High Street was the King's Hall (now the Cannon Cinema). Here the Manor House pupils put on their annual concert and with some trepidation we had to play our piano pieces or dance for the benefit of the large audience of parents and friends. The Hall was also used by the local choral and orchestral societies. When it became a cinema there was a also a small restaurant in later years.

Our favourite walks were to Bexley along Bexley Lane, now Hurst Road, where the chestnut trees grew thickly in the woods and across the raspberry fields, past gypsy caravans and behind the former Alma Road Girls School. Another walk was to feed the ducks in the pond at the side of Selbourne Road and to look into Doug Holland's forge nearby to see the furnace burning and hear the sound of his hammer on the anvil. Sometimes we would sit on the banks of the Sidcup by-pass, or 'new road' as we called it, to watch the cars go by. A special treat was a trip to Shoreham for a picnic. The buses left from a yard beside the Black Horse and went to Farningham where we had to catch another bus. Walks to Chislehurst Common through the Scadbury Estate were also pleasant especially if we had tea at Battles, the quaint little tea shop on the Chislehurst Parade so interestingly described in Mr Battles' book 'Edwardian Chislehurst'.

Like a theatre the stage of Sidcup is still here, only the scenery has changed. Fortunately some of the 'players' are still with us and we must record their memories while we can.



ST. JOHN'S - 1884

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