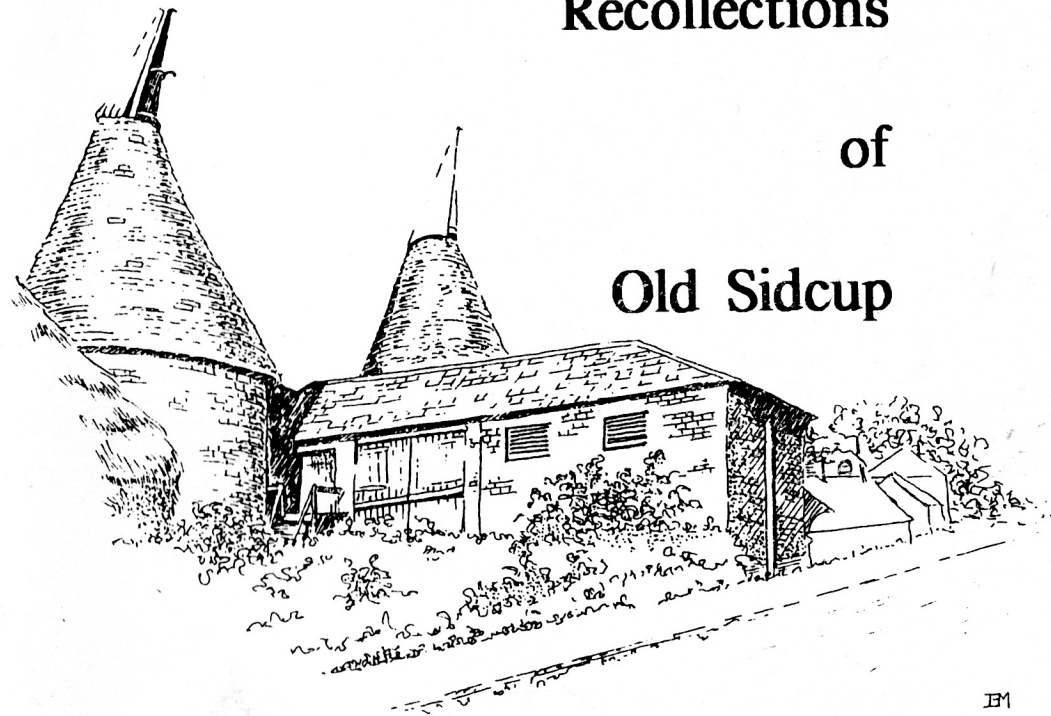


Lamorbey
& Sidcup
LOCAL
HISTORY SOCIETY

Further
Recollections
of
Old Sidcup



Monograph series

No. 1

**FURTHER RECOLLECTIONS OF
OLD SIDCUP**



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Further Recollections of Old Sidcup

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

THE GREAT STORM

*DO YOU REMEMBER?
RECOLLECTIONS OF BLACKFEN
& HALFWAY STREET*

*SIDCUP REMEMBERED:
RECOLLECTIONS OF OLD SIDCUP*

This monograph supplements our previous publication:
SIDCUP REMEMBERED.

We are indebted to our member Dr. John Seymour for his own recollections and for gathering and submitting those of Miss S.G. Davidson, Mrs. M.L.G. Downie and Mrs. M.L. Turnbull.

Mr. M. Hook's memories were recorded when we invited residents to Sidcup Library.

Mrs. Whenham's account was sent to the Society by her son, Mr. Dave Whenham.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover Oasts at Vinson's Farm.
Page 4 Cockerell's on Station Approach.
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Page 20 Doug. Holland's smithy.
Page 27 Footscray Place - rear view.

Drawings by I.E.Morris
from photographs supplied by Local Studies
of Hall Place, Bourne Road, Bexley, Kent.

Lamorbey & Sidcup Local History Society.

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

'PIP' HAYWARD

A PAST CHAIRMAN

& VICE - PRESIDENT

OF THE SOCIETY.

DR. JOHN SEYMOUR

(HIS OWN STORY)

My father was a tea merchant who was on company business with my mother in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) when I was born in Colombo in 1927. We returned to Sidcup a year later so I have no memories of the Far East. I have lived in Sidcup ever since so my reminiscences start in the early 1930s.

My home at 5 Priestlands Park Road, where I lived with my parents Arthur and Dorothy and younger brother Peter, was not far from the railway. Although the line was electrified in 1926 steam engines were used for shunting: an abiding memory is that of lying in bed at night listening to the chuff and clank from the goods yard. It sometimes seemed to go on for hours. Another memory concerns the book *Our Home Railways* published in 1910, which belonged to my father and was illustrated with some splendid colour plates of locomotives in their pre-grouping colours: this he would show to my brother and me as a special treat.

My father had also kept a 1906 model steam engine from his boyhood and my brother and I provided the perfect excuse to bring this out occasionally. The boiler was filled with water and heated by a methylated spirits burner: it ran round and round the dining room floor, complete with steam whistle blowing! On the opposite side of the road lived the Gilbertson family, where the children were much older than me so I did not know them well. However, their father had several steam-powered model railway engines and he would sometimes invite me over to see the trains running.

The garden at No 5 was fairly large, with an oak tree that had been left over from Priestlands Wood when the house was built in 1905. There was a good stretch of lawn which I found to be well suited to flying small model aeroplanes, usually obtained from W. Carveth Rowe in the High Street: unfortunately as succeeding models became larger the garden proved to be too small and they were continually flying over the fences on either side! As a result I was banished to Longlands Recreation Ground, commonly known as the Rec. and happily still an open space today, containing many more trees from Priestlands Wood at one end. Whilst in the Rec. one day in 1936 I remember seeing the German airship Graf Zeppelin flying up the Thames towards London.

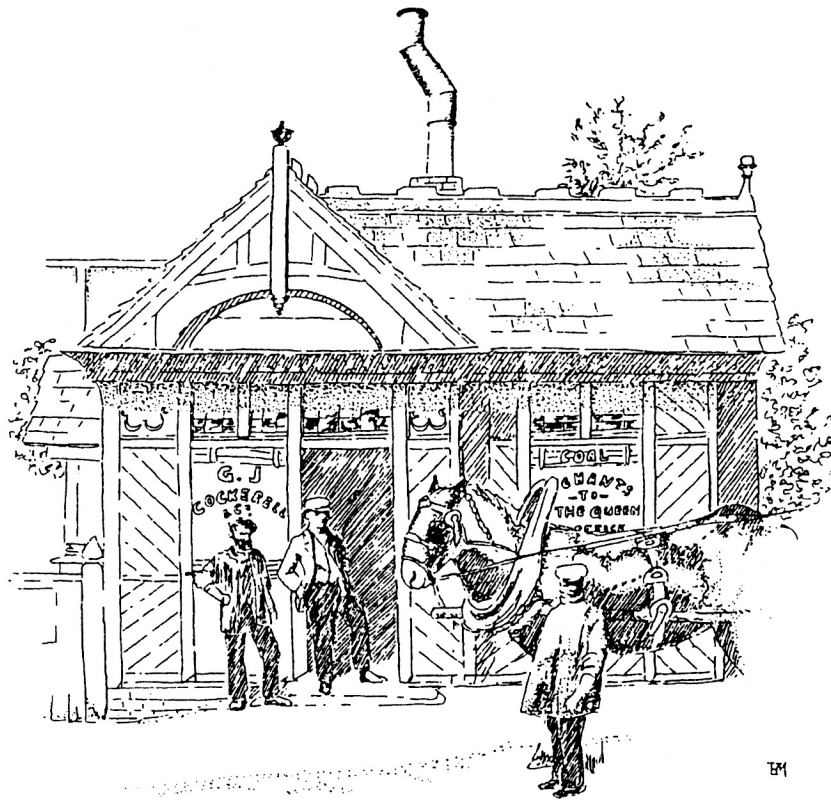
Other pastimes included riding in a small cart down Christchurch Road, avoiding the potholes as the road was unmade at that time and had been known as the Donkey Road. Presumably this referred to earlier years when donkeys were kept in the open fields nearby. Much later, in the 1960s when my mother needed help in the garden this was provided by an old Sidcup resident, Mr. Price. He used to tell her of his childhood at the turn of the century in Black Horse Road, where he was one of twenty-one children, all living together in the same small house. At mealtimes the seating started in the kitchen and continued in pairs of children all the way up the stairs!

Both my brother and I went to Miss Rayment of Station Road for piano lessons. She had been a student at the Leipzig Conservatoire in the 1890s and recalled seeing Brahms and Greig conduct there, describing Brahms as a little man with a face covered in hair. Other memories of No.5 concern the various people who sold their wares from the street, which included

the crumpet man with a loud handbell and the Walls ice-cream man with a *Stop Me and Buy One* notice on his tricycle. His bell was not as loud so that you could tell which was which without looking out. The most intriguing was the fresh-fish man who drove an Austin Seven car with its back seats replaced by a van body. It had ice compartments to keep the fish fresh and scales to weigh it in but every weekend the seats were put back for trips to the seaside!

Returning to Sidcup Station, this was gas-lit and there was no footbridge so anyone wanting to go up Station Road had to walk down the ramp. This went past a wooden slide down which baggage could be passed to a waiting taxi. At the bottom of the ramp was the Station Hotel with its stables and further down, in the early 1930s, were the tall oasts of Vinson's Farm in Halfway Street, near where Lamorbey Swimming Centre now stands. At the bottom of the ramp on the left was a boot repairer in a very small shop, strategically placed for the benefit of commuters. Turning left one walked under the bridge along a narrow path with a bent handrail, providing nominal protection against the traffic.

The Station Approach was on the other side of the bridge, with the office of G.J. Cockerell & Co. Coal Merchants to Queen Victoria, of whom more later. A red General double-decker bus with an open staircase might be waiting outside one of the large houses surrounded by trees which were such a feature of Station Road. In one of these houses, where Station Parade now stands was the first school that I attended. This was the P.N.E.U. (Parents National Education Union) school run by Miss Andrews, with the view from the front windows being enlivened by the activity in Station Road.



There was a bakery on the corner of Manor and Station Roads with its own ovens. The delicious smell of freshly baked bread, when I passed the shop on the way to school in the mornings, is a strong memory and in fact baking continued there until the 1970s. The shop fronts on this side of Station Road were decorated with a graceful stone arcading which had been part of the outside of St. John's Church. When the church was

rebuilt for the first time in 1875 some of the arcading found its way to these shops where it remains visible on the two end ones. On the opposite side of Station Road was Roadnights the Chemist run by the two ever cheerful Misses Roadnight. This shop was advertised in the 1898 Sidcup Directory and is still going strong.

The next turning off Station Road is Crescent Road where my paternal grandparents, Ernest and Nellie Seymour, lived at No.16 and where my father Arthur was born in 1894. They came to Sidcup from Kentish Town in 1891, just after Ernest married my grandmother, Nellie Fores, whose father was a printseller and publisher in Piccadilly. At that time houses had been built only on the north side, the opposite side being open fields until the 1920s. All the early north side houses have a dog-tooth decorated arch over the front door, indicating that they were built by one of the Hawkins family of Sidcup.

Where the garage is now at no.16 there used to be a conservatory, in which Ernest, who was a keen cyclist, kept his penny-farthing bicycle to the end of his life in 1943. He had bought it in the early 1880s when he belonged to the Athenaeum Bicycle Club based in North London. I have a Club Record Book in which rides into the Middlesex countryside are described in detail from March to October 1882 and as far afield as Devon. To the left of the front door there is still the study, where I had many talks with my grandfather in the 1930s and 40s. He often told me of the railways he knew as a boy and showed me some water-colour paintings, mainly of L.N.W.R. locomotives of the 1870s, beautifully done by his friend Horace Bacon. I still have some of these to remind me of those talks. Sometimes he mentioned geometry, which he studied for relaxation.

A curious custom when we went to no. 16 for Sunday lunch was to have a break between the main course and the sweet. Everyone would leave the table and walk round the garden if the weather was suitable or round the conservatory if not, to admire the plants. Nuts would also be eaten to aid digestion. The Alderman family lives at No.16 now and Mrs. Alderman very kindly invited my wife and me to see her home: as I had not been inside the house since 1943 it was an interesting experience to return there!

I can remember a large oil painting of a full-rigged sailing ship hanging on the landing of No.16 and the story was that my great-grandfather George Seymour was her captain. I discovered later that his voyages included New Zealand, India and the Mediterranean and that he was one of three Seymour brothers born in Bridport, Dorset between 1817 and 1827, all of whom became master mariners. I also found that there was a ship like the one in the painting called *Her Majesty*, which was first commanded by George and then by his brother John. At about the time of my grandfather's marriage, George and his wife Anne retired to Belle Grove, on Watling Street by the nurseries then near Welling Station, where he died in 1915. My grandfather had preceded my father as a tea merchant with the same firm, Theodor and Rawlins and also travelled extensively for them. In 1912-13 he went to Shanghai and Nanking, out via Marseilles and the Suez Canal and home via the Trans-Siberian Railway, completed in 1904. Fortunately his cabin was Port Out, Starboard Home (POSH) through the Red Sea which avoided the worst of the heat.

When I knew No. 16 in the 1930s it was decorated in a very different manner to the heavy Victorian style. Wallpapers were pale, paintwork was off-white and the

well-spaced furniture was covered in light-coloured fabrics, all probably reflecting my grandmother's taste. There could not have been a greater contrast with the home of my maternal grandparents, who lived near the top of Station Road at no. 14, where Sidcup House now stands.

My maternal grandfather, Claud Beater, was the younger son of Rev. Orlando Beater, the Headmaster of Marlborough House School from 1892 to 1904. This school was in Chislehurst Road facing Sidcup Place and one member of the teaching staff was Mr. E. Basil Spurgin. He was the brother of my grandmother Rosalie Spurgin and eventually became Vicar of St. John's Church from 1902 to 1938, Honorary Canon of Rochester Cathedral and Rural Dean of Sidcup. The Spurgin family had moved to Gresham Lodge, Station Road in 1893 with their mother, soon after the death of their father the Rector of Gresham in Norfolk. They chose Sidcup not only because Basil was there but also to allow other members of the family to work in London. My grandparents met at Marlborough House School, married in 1899 and moved into 14 Station Road, calling it Crossing Lodge after one of Claud's childhood homes in Essex. My mother was born there in 1903.

The inside of No.14 was effectively a time capsule, as the house had been built in the 1870s, refurnished in a typically comfortable Victorian style in 1899 and scarcely changed until the Beaters left in 1954. It was decorated with patterned wallpaper and dark paint, the curtains were heavy and the furniture congested. All the cooking was done on the kitchen range, using fuel from the cellar down below and one of my grandfather's daily chores was to bring the coal up to the kitchen. The pipe carrying the main water supply to

the roof tank ran up the *outside* of the house and into the roof: naturally it froze regularly every winter! In the dining room, on the wall to the left of the fireplace was Rosalie's photographic collection of nineteenth century ancestor portraits, mostly clergyman, while Claud's desk and substantial bookcase stood to the right. On the opposite side of the room was a bust of Napoleon, with a very large allegorical print of Napoleon on his deathbed being viewed by the Duke of Wellington. Napoleon was the man most admired by my grandfather until 1940 when Winston Churchill was also esteemed. Claud's large Napoleonic library was then extended to include the Churchill books.

Other decorations at No.14 included stuffed birds from Claud's early days wildfowling on the Essex marshes and large architectural drawings of French cathedrals done by his elder brother Gordon. The sitting room was comfortable but overcrowded with furniture and nicknacks. Here the main items were my grandmother's piano and my grandfather's two wireless sets. Both my grandmother and my mother were good pianists and much involved in the activities of St. John's Church so their piano playing was useful when hymns were required. I still have a copy of Beethoven's Sonatas presented to my grandmother for her work with the Victoria League. In the 1920s, when broadcasting first began, my grandfather had bought a wireless running on accumulators and then replaced it with a mains-powered one in the 1930s. However, he retained the earlier one in case of breakdown and every month he took the accumulators to a local garage for charging. His taste in music was selective, as he preferred Rossini to any other composer.

My grandmother ran the Mothers' Meeting at St. John's Church. It included a Slate Club, outings and the

Christmas entertainment, where Mr. Samuel performed monologues and Mr. Sheed attempted conjuring tricks. Rosalie and I enjoyed many a game of chess in the 30s and 40s. At first she always beat me but later the honours were about even. "*You must have been in the knife-box, boy*" she would say when I did win! She was known in the parish as the Lady with the Basket, as she always distributed delicacies to those parishioners that were ill. Speaking from experience, one of these was a delicious home-made broth of variable composition. This came from a pot with a permanent place on her coal-fired kitchen range and since the fire was never allowed to go out the pot was continually on the go! Her cat approved of the continuous fire too because there was always a warm spot to curl up in.

My grandfather had a great dislike of being shut in while travelling, so up to 1919 he drove a motor-cycle and from then until he died in 1956 he had a series of open-top tourers, most of them bought from Clifford's Garage in the Main Road. One problem was that the roof was made of canvas, which rotted after two or three years and let in the rain. He always knew when the leaks had become unacceptable because my grandmother would put up her umbrella *inside* the car! He ran an agency covering Kent and Surrey, in which he negotiated bulk deliveries of coal to firms like the Black Eagle Brewery at Westerham and J. & E. Hall of Dartford. The coal usually came from Betteshanger Colliery in the Kentish coalfield and sometimes from local merchants such as Cockerells or Woolridges. This was an ideal occupation for him, as frequent car journeys allowed him to indulge his fondness for the open air and the countryside. It was always a treat to go with him, since he had a large supply of funny stories, and he never completely retired. By 1949, when he was 76, he claimed to have driven 400,000

miles in the course of business journeys through Kent alone. He purchased his last car, an Austin tourer, in 1936, which remained in the family until 1965.

MRS. M.M. TURNBULL

Mrs. Mary Turnbull is the daughter of Canon Basil Spurgin, who was Vicar of St. John's Church, Sidcup from 1902 to 1938. She was born in 1912, one of the four Spurgin children born and brought up at the Vicarage, which was demolished in 1936 to make way for the shops in St. John's Parade. She remembers it as a large, cold house, naturally without central heating and on getting up on a winter's morning she used to run from her bedroom to the bathroom where at least the water was hot! During the First World War all the family came downstairs during the night air raids and she would push her younger brother Elton in his pram up and down the passageway on the ground floor. The two children were taken one day to see a bomb crater in the fields near Alder Road, which used to be opposite Orchard Road. Late in 1917 there were daylight raids and on one occasion the children were down the garden watching the German bombers flying towards London. Someone came to fetch them to take shelter under the church but before they could get there they saw the planes turn round and fly back without dropping anything.

The Vicarage garden was surrounded by a high brick wall, which not only prevented people seeing in but also stopped the Spurgin children looking out. Imagine their delight when they found a convenient compost heap on the Church Road side which allowed them to wave and talk to passers-by, at least until this was firmly forbidden! The Vicarage garden was large and often

used by the National School in Birkbeck Road which was a St. John's Church foundation. Prizegivings, feasts and dancing round the Maypole were some of the activities taking place there and the garden led off St. John's Hall which was very convenient if the weather turned wet. It was possible to see over the garden wall from an upstairs window which was especially interesting on Bank Holidays. Sidcup was deep in the country for South-East Londoners and they would come down on the 21 bus, which had been running since 1908, to walk along the country lanes and pick the wild flowers. The bus ran from Moorgate through New Cross and Lewisham terminating in Black Horse Yard. At going home time the queue of bluebell-laden holiday makers would stretch all the way down St. John's Road.

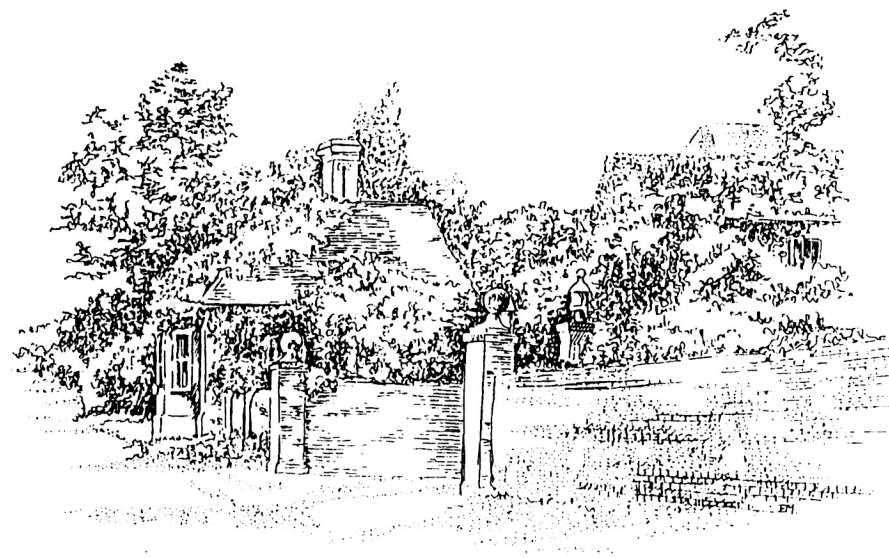
St. John's Church played a large part in the lives of the Spurgin children. Every Sunday at 3 p.m. there was Sunday School, with some eight rows of children in St. John's Church and one teacher to each row. This was followed by the Children's Service conducted by the Canon. The Spurgin children sat with some others behind the last row: they attended further services as they grew older. Their punctual attendance was ensured by a piece of Vicarage furniture standing in the hall, which still survives in good order today. This is a handsome grandfather clock, which was a present from his brothers and sisters to Basil Spurgin on the occasion of his wedding to Gladys Layton in 1905. Every Saturday evening he wound it up and set it two minutes fast so that his family would not be late for the Sunday services. When he died in 1961 Mrs. Turnbull's mother passed it on to her *"because" she says "I remembered standing beside him watching him wind it up"*. Canon Spurgin was a much loved and respected father whose bark was worse than his bite and the

children greatly enjoyed being taken out in his motor-cycle and sidecar, for trips and holidays up until the 1920s. He also coached in Latin those taking the equivalents of O and A levels.

In a large parish like St. John's there were many parishioners to be visited in their homes when they were ill, bereaved or aged. Since Mrs. Spurgin was fortunate enough to have help with looking after her children she was able to assist Canon Spurgin with the visiting, which she much enjoyed. She would say, "*All the parishioners are my friends,*" and kept open house on a Friday when any parishioner could call at the Vicarage for a chat and a cup of tea. The mother of Miss Ivy Barry of Black Horse Road could remember these visits 50 years later. The mother of Miss Stevens of Birkbeck Road still recalls the Sunday School children contributing their pennies to buy a gold cross for Mrs. Turnbull's christening. It can be seen in a photograph of Mrs. Turnbull taken when she was three months old and wearing the cross, which she has now given to one of her granddaughters.

Mrs. Spurgin was born in 1880 at 21 Carlton Road, her father being Edward Layton who was a solicitor. The family later moved to a house in the High Street, where the cinema now is and then to Sidcup House, which used to stand opposite the Vicarage and they ended up at Harford Cottage in Knoll Road. In later life she lived again at 21 Carlton Road and so came back to where she had started. One of her Sunday afternoon walks from Sidcup House was across the raspberry fields to Bexley to visit Mr. Layton's father at Park House, which still stands opposite the end of Hurst Road. She also remembered being taken as a child by her father to visit Lord Sidney at Frognaal House, where there were some steps leading down into a garden from the sitting

room and she was allowed to jump down them, one at a time on to the lawn. Over 80 years later she was taken by Mrs. Turnbull to Queen Mary's Hospital for treatment. "*I know this place,*" she said to the nurse. "*I jumped down the steps at the back on to the lawn as a child.*" The nurse thought that her mind was wandering but Mrs. Turnbull was able to confirm that it was perfectly true. Edward Layton was a wonderful father and grandfather, who was not above chasing his young grand-daughter around the Vicarage garden with a stick! Her grandmother was rather more conventional. She came from Southampton where her brother was M.P. for some years.



"We used to do a lot of walking when we were young," says Mrs. Turnbull. Up to the hayfield at the top of Frognal along Chislehurst Road, then down Watery Lane where the children were actually allowed to drag their sticks through the water! Or the other way round through the gate by Freeby on the Green to the old Golf Links, walking to Frognal House and back by Watery Lane and up Sidcup Hill. Another route took them to Chislehurst up Perry Street, past the gate to the Old Cottage (still there near the new A20), past the Western Motor Works(now managed by the grandson of the first owner, Mr. Bennet) on to St. Paul's Cray Common and back down Plum Lane. Perry Street was so narrow that when the 228 bus service started only one was allowed to run to Chislehurst with the same one coming back. Plum Lane connected the Common to Watery Lane and was cut in two by the new Sidcup bypass in 1926 but in compensation it was entertaining to sit beside the new road on Bank Holidays and watch the traffic go by. Another fascinating pastime was watching the smith, Doug Holland at work in his forge shoeing horses just opposite the Vicarage. From the smithy the children walked past the pond at the top of Rectory Lane, down Bexley Lane as far as the railway bridge and turned left. This took them through the bluebell woods, where Faraday Avenue is now, to the site of the present Arts and Adult Education Centre at Alma Road and then back to Lansdown Road.

Mrs. Turnbull at first went to the Manor House School for Girls on the Green (now the Registry Office), where the headmistress was Miss Blofeld. She stayed until she was twelve and then attended a school at Worthing which she left in 1930. In setting off for Worthing by train the most convenient way was to take a 21 bus to New Eltham as the 51 to Sidcup Station was not yet running. As she grew up she was encouraged to help

MISS S.G. DAVIDSON

Miss Sheelagh Davidson was born in Nelson Road in 1923, the second of five children. Her father was born in Dublin of Scottish Protestant parents, one of a family of twelve and in 1914 he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. His photograph, taken in December 1914 shows him already with corporal's stripes. He was posted to the Western Front and in May 1916 was severely wounded in the face while bringing in a stretcher case. It was two months before he was admitted into Aldershot Hospital. There he was treated by Major (later Sir) Harold Gillies, who was pioneering facial plastic surgery. When Queen Mary's Hospital was opened in pre-fabricated huts in 1917 Major Gillies was transferred there with all his patients. After eleven operations, with the last one in 1919, her father became the first person to have a successful reconstruction of his lips and nose. Major Gillies said that he knew that Miss Davidson's father was on the way to recovery when he could hear his Irish brogue once again!

Convalescent patients were made to go out as much as possible in order to overcome any embarrassment due to their injuries: they wore a blue uniform with a red tie. Miss Davidson's father often walked into Sidcup to collect the patients' mail at the Post Office. There he met her mother who was a counter clerk. She married Corporal Davidson in December, 1919, although she had never known him before he was wounded. After he was discharged he took a job as a porter at Queen Mary's Hospital because he was still self-conscious about his face. His low wages were augmented by a full disability pension and his wife took in ironing and washing to help their finances.

They lived at first in a small cottage, 4 Nelson Road, which was rented to patients at Queen Mary's Hospital who were working there. It had an outside toilet, two rooms upstairs and two downstairs and was demolished when the temporary library was built. Here Miss Davidson's eldest brother and herself were born and when a third child was on the way in 1928 they moved into 15 Hatherley Road, where Becketts' Garage is now.

Further down Hatherley Road, the novelist Nevil Shute had been lodging, when he was the Chief Calculator for the Vickers Company of Crayford. In his autobiography, *Slide Rule*, he mentions living in Sidcup and describes his work on the R100 airship, which was a private venture developed in parallel with the Government-funded R101. Mrs. Davidson had taken in two lodgers of her own, Leo Rubeck and Frank Scruby. They were radio operators based at Kolster Brands and they were working on the R101. Leo Rubeck was going on the flight of the R101 but was made to step down as an official from the Air Ministry wanted to go. This undoubtedly saved Leo's life.

Two more children were born at No.15 and Miss Davidson's grandmother from Biddenden, who was in poor health, moved in too. The house was full but later her grandmother's health improved and she was able to return to Biddenden. She lent the Davidsons £50 to go towards buying their own home, so they purchased a semi-detached chalet house on Sidcup Hill opposite the Baptist Church in 1933. The children all attended Oxford Road Primary School where one of the teachers was called Mrs.L.Wearn who comes into the story later. In 1934 Miss Davidson and her older brother won scholarships to the Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar Schools in Sidcup and the three younger children went

on to the Technical Schools. Her eldest brother went into the R.A.F. as a Halton boy in 1938 at the age of 16 and was sent to Canada for training as a pilot in 1942. He became a pilot and married a Canadian girl. He was commissioned, served as an instructor for the duration of the war and then was appointed as a senior pilot with Air Canada when peace came. Meanwhile, Miss Davidson remembers that after Dunkirk wounded soldiers came to Queen Mary's and that each house within a mile or so had a soldier or nurse billeted in it. Due to their large household the Davidsons had just one nurse living with them and she stayed for about a year.

Miss Davidson left school in 1941 and worked initially in the Records Office at Foots Cray. In 1942 she joined the W.A.A.F. and in 1944 was posted to R.A.F. Biggin Hill and other fighter stations as an Operations Room Plotter. On the 6th January, 1945 she was posted to the Far East and demobbed in 1947. She served the country for five years in total.

Her most outstanding memories of this period, and indeed of her whole life, occurred when she was serving with the W.A.A.F. in India. The Mrs. Wearn from Oxford Road School mentioned above had a brother who supervised a cinchona plantation at Darjeeling, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Cinchona is a plant used to produce quinine for the treatment of malaria. Miss Davidson had to obtain her parents' permission to visit him and was also required to take another girl with her due to wartime regulations. She clearly remembers seeing the peaks of the Himalayas from Darjeeling, including Mount Everest. On another occasion the two girls were allowed to go to an address at Srinagar, in Kashmir, with its beautiful lakes. She had hoped to get as far as Peshawar on the North-West

frontier, where her mother had been born but this was not possible in the time available.

After her service in the W.A.A.F. Miss Davidson had acquired the urge to travel. She had not met her elder brother since 1942, so she was looking for a job that would take her within reach of Canada. In 1947, after an interview at Orpington, she was accepted as a nurse on a two-year contract to an English diplomatic family with children living in Washington D.C. and although she was three thousand miles away from her brother's home, they were able to meet. This was followed by a clerical job in London and then she worked as a companion-housekeeper in Paris for two years and in a similar post in Belgium for eighteen months. She finally settled in the Council Careers Office in Station Road in 1959 and took early retirement in 1982 following a move to Bexleyheath.

During her time in Sidcup Miss Davidson met some of the local characters, such as Smokey Joe. Her mother gave him food and Miss Davidson describes him as a very friendly person who accepted cigarettes from her when he was in Grassington Road. From North Cray Kate she heard her first swear words: sadly Kate met her end under the wheels of a lorry whilst thumbing a lift. Then there was Muttering Alf who lived in Foots Cray and shambled along muttering to himself. Another man whose development had been retarded lived with his family on Sidcup Hill and distinguished himself after listening to the radio in 1940 by running down the road shouting, "*The Dutch have invaded Holland!*"

As a child Miss Davidson was often sent by her mother on errands to the shops in Sidcup High Street, so here are some that she remembers from the 1920's and 1930's:

Cave Austen, with its delicious smell of coffee being ground;

Foxwell's leather shop;

David Greig, with its green and white tiles. Here she remembers the butter pats being carefully squared up by the shop assistant and finished off with a thistle stamped on the top. She had to ask for a piece of cheese from the middle to avoid any rind, Dundee cake for her father and Angel cake for the children;

Groombridge's cycle shop, actually in St. John's Parade.

Kemp's shoe repairers, near Groombridge's;

Pattullo Higgs, corn merchants;

Pierce's fresh fish shop;

Miss Morris' dress shop with

Mr. Morris' gents outfitter on the opposite side of the High Street;

Victor Plant, newsagent and cigarettes;

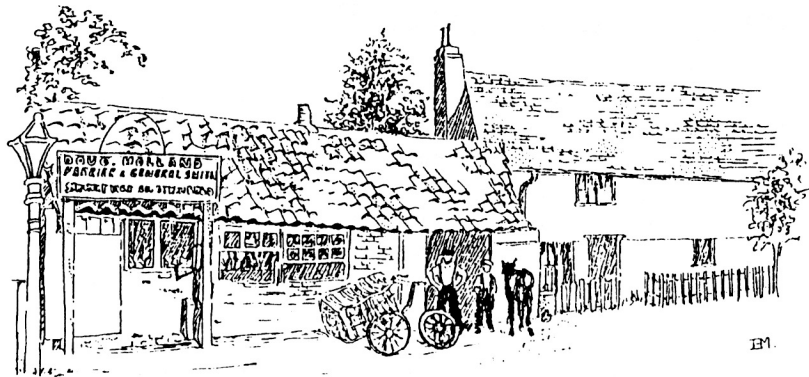
Popplewell's, drapers and haberdashery. The two Popplewell sisters who ran the shop seemed to a child to have their hair wound in earphones!

MRS. M.L.G. DOWNIE

Mrs. Margaret Downie was born at 2 Carlton Road, Sidcup in 1903, the only daughter of Frank and Lily Bunting and the family moved to 19 Selborne Road in 1908, so that Mrs. Bunting's father could live with them. He was the Rev. Orlando Beater, the headmaster of Marlborough House School in Chislehurst Road, from 1892 to 1904. In 1908 Orlando was a widower and living in lodgings in Station Road but at No. 19 he had much more room, with his own study and space for his books. The house was built in 1903 by Arnolds and the Buntings had electricity installed when they

moved in. At the same time Orlando bought an Ibach grand piano which resided in the sitting room at No. 19, ostensibly as a present for his young granddaughter but since he was an excellent pianist he often played it himself. The piano is still in very good playing condition.

At that time houses were built only on one side of Selborne Road. Opposite them was a large hayfield (called Arnold's Meadow) which was leased to Craybrooke Farm. Specimen trees were planted in the field to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and the farmhouse stood where the Toyota (previously Sheppard's) garage is now. The hayfield was very popular for parties and picnics after the hay had been mown in the summer. At the top of the road was an attractive duckpond fed by springs with a stream flowing from it through the field, while just above the pond stood Doug. Holland's smithy.



This was clearly a very desirable environment but in the 1930s the hayfield was on sale for £3,000. Mr. Bunting tried to save it from development by asking all the people living nearby to contribute towards buying it for the community and everyone he asked made a contribution, except for three Scotsmen who found it difficult to part with their money. One of these lived at Selborne Court and was involved in railway management. "*I am much better at making money than spending it,*" was his reply and in the event not enough cash could be raised anyway and the development went ahead.

Mr. Bunting had first come to Sidcup from Tolleshunt d'Arcy in Essex. This was the next parish to Tolleshunt Major where the Rev. Orlando Beater was Vicar from 1885 to 1892. His daughter Lily had been assisting with a church fete and someone suggested, "*Get Frank Bunting to help you*" which was how they first met. When Frank wished to live near London in order to work as a jobber on the Stock Exchange it was natural that he would become one of the lodgers at Marlborough House School. Frank and Lily were married in 1899, not in St. John's Church because it was being rebuilt but at St. Nicholas Church in Chislehurst, travelling there by horse and carriage.

Mr. Bunting was Churchwarden and Treasurer of St. John's Church for 26 years from 1919 to 1945. There was only a small endowment and when he was first appointed most of the church income was obtained from pew rents, although not all parishioners wished to rent a pew. He replaced the rents with freewill offerings, which were contributed by many more people and so income was considerably increased. Mr. Bunting was chairman, secretary or treasurer of many organisations in Sidcup, causing Mr. Tom Knight to

comment, "If Frank is treasurer he does all the work, so I will be the secretary!" He was a very keen gardener, with a heated greenhouse for tender plants and he also kept chickens.

Mrs. Bunting was involved in St. John's activities by running the cake stall at the yearly Church sale, with Miss Purser looking after the missionary sale in November. Mrs. Bunting not only provided her own creations but persuaded many others to donate theirs as well. The ingredients came from the High Street and she would illustrate the deferential attitude of some shopkeepers in the 1920s by quoting Mr. W. Carveth Rowe, who ran a stationers where Forbuoys is now. He greeted her one cold day with, "I do like to see a lady looking out from a nest of furs." She only wanted to choose a pencil so "Don't let me keep you," she said. Back came the reply, "I'd rather be with you, Madam!" A fascinating shop opposite Boot's, called Hammond and Trot, sold both ironmongery and groceries. It was a very dark shop with brooms on racks swinging from the ceiling and it was quite difficult to enter up the two steep steps. The grocer became lyrical about his wares, "Oh do have the Pan Yan", he said, "it's a sublime pickle!"

In those days people used to eat a lot of meat, as it was relatively cheap and at the end of the week there was a *book* to pay. This was meticulously kept by the butchers presiding over their open displays of meat and poultry. At Dawson's the stately Miss Milton was in charge of fashions and was very knowledgeable and impressive: even Mrs. Bunting's sister, who lived at St. John's Wood, would come to Sidcup to consult her.

Makeup was not worn very much in Sidcup until Miss Hanson, of Hanson's the Chemist on the corner of High

Street and Hadlow Road, went on a course to learn how to apply it. She used herself as a model in the shop and the results were so attractive that sales increased considerably! Then there was the agony of being trussed to a heavy machine to have a *perm*. It took a very long time: first the hair was wound round elaborate curlers, then these had to be linked to the machine above the head and one had to remain immovable until the process was complete. It's a good deal easier nowadays!

Mrs. Downie went to Westburton School at the Manor House, where the Principal was Miss Pearse and then to a boarding school at Broadstairs. After leaving school in 1921 she started painting and joined the art school housed at the end of the old St. John's Hall. A family friend, Gladstone Solomon, former Principal of the Bombay School of Art, praised her work so she went to Byam Shaw at Notting Hill Gate for three years and then to Chelsea Polytechnic. She became a full-time artist, sharing a studio with Eleanor Barton in Cheyne Row, painting portraits and commuting by train to Chelsea every day from Sidcup.

However, she was partly supported by her father but the Industrial Market in which he worked was badly affected by both World Wars and especially by the second one. Indeed he was doing so little business that he found it more convenient to travel to the City on the 21 bus than by train. Mrs. Downie realised that she had to get better paid work, so she trained as an Occupational Therapist at the London School in Hampstead from 1942-45. After this she was accepted as a head O.T. at Bethlem Royal Hospital, West Wickham, which later joined with the Maudsley Hospital at Denmark Hill.

In her spare time Mrs. Downie ran the Brownies at St. John's Church and the numbers became so large that she enlisted the help of Miss Spurgin, later Mrs. Turnbull when she left school in 1930. Mrs. Downie looked after the Sidcup and Footscray children between 1930 and 1939, meeting either at the old stables in Footscray Place or at St. John's Hall on Friday evenings. On summer evenings there were the tennis clubs on Sidcup Hill and at Crescent Farm, while through the year dances were held at the King's Hall in the High Street or the Public Hall in Hatherley Road. The dances were organised by the cricket, tennis and football clubs and various charities but the best of all was the hospital dance. At first the catering was arranged by the individual committees (after all, the wives had organised cricket teas during the summer and rucker teas during the winter) but later Chuter's were employed. They were the bakers on the corner of Nelson Road and the High Street.

Until 1939 dances were selected by programme, where the girls would line up against the wall and the boys wrote their names against the dances. Naturally, each girl hoped to get her programme full, with a special boyfriend for the supper dance but if this did not happen she became a *wallflower* for some of the time. She would be saved by the Paul Jones, in which the boys and girls rotated in two concentric circles and when the music stopped those facing each other became partners for the next dance.

Another popular activity at the King's Hall, which stood where the Cannon cinema is now, was the annual pantomime written by Mr. Corthorne of Lansdown Road before the First World War. Ken Samuel from the Park took the male lead and when Mr. Corthorne retired he wrote the pantomimes, which were published

by French. Ken Samuel's uncle Roly Washington, his mother and sister Gladys from the Crescent, all contributed. Gladys Samuel was a very gifted pianist and she and her mother arranged the dances. There was an excellent orchestra including professionals which also gave very good public concerts. Later Barbara Crusoe produced some outstanding shows: she was a very good teacher of dancing, with many pupils.

A different type of show was produced for charity at another time of the year at the King's Hall by Mrs. Speck of Granville Road. One of these productions was Quality Street, in which Mrs. Downie had a small part and another in the late 1920s was a Pageant of the British Empire, in which Mrs. Speck played Britannia. Ken Samuel later moved into the Crescent with his sister and another family living there was the Snellings, with a daughter Isabel who was a very good, though nervous, pianist. According to the terms of a family will the parents could inherit only when they had a son. After seven daughters their financial outlook looked very bleak!

Other public performances were organised by the Russell family who lived in the High Street opposite the Post Office. Colonel Russell had retired from the Indian Army and was a Churchwarden at Christchurch: he had two daughters who were both missionaries in India. One of them gave magic lantern shows on several countries in one evening, spending only a few minutes on each one before moving to the next, which gave rise to her nickname of *Tip and Run*. Local young people appeared dressed in appropriate costume, including Mrs. Downie and repeated words given to them by the daughter only moments before!

In the 1920s the first crystal sets allowed one to *listen*

in. The radio followed, then just before the Second World War a few people were boasting that they had television. Mrs Downie's enjoyment of TV came when she went to her cousin Mrs. Dorothy Seymour to see the 1953 Coronation on a small set. That was a real thrill and so many people bought TV sets then just to view the Coronation that it was a great boost to trade.

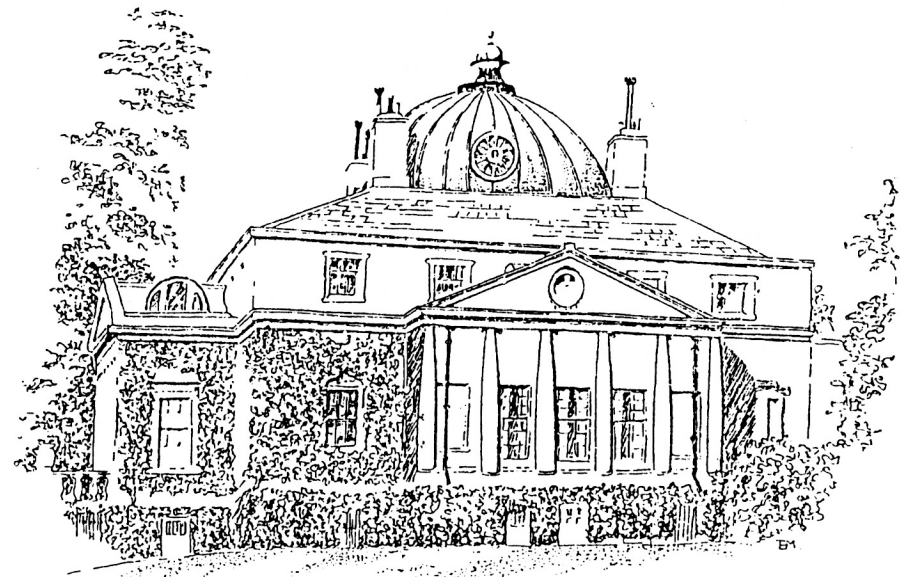
The Solomons came to Sidcup at the turn of the century and lived in the Park. Mrs. Downie's grandmother had nearly married Mrs. Solomon's brother, Scott Thompson, but he went off to Singapore for forty years, the engagement was called off and she married Orlando Beater instead. Mrs. Solomon and her daughter Daisy were active members of the Women's Rights movement or suffragettes and knew the Pankhursts well. Both chained themselves to the railings outside the Houses of Parliament and were sent to prison for three months, with the mother being in the prison hospital most of the time due to her age and poor health.

Mrs. Downie's grandmother was also a friend of Lord and Lady Waring of Foots Cray Place and Mrs. Downie remembers going there for tea and dinner with her mother: Lord Waring was the local Scout Commissioner. Foots Cray Place was a beautiful mansion, one of only three square Palladian buildings, with splendid pillars and dome. Early in the Second World War thieves stole the copper from the roof and it was burnt out when workmen started fires in the old chimneys. There was another lovely house opposite St. John's Vicarage called Sidcup House, built in a Georgian style with red brick.

Bexley Lane was only built up on one side and until the

housing developments of the 1930s there were open fields with a footpath right through to Bexley. Birchwood Avenue was a cul-de-sac with woodland on the right going down. The footpath through Scadbury Lodges was called Plum Lane: it led up to St. Paul's Cray Common and really did pass between plum trees. In the winter there was skating on the shallow lakes at Foots Cray Place and Lamorbey which were open to the public, while polo was played at Foxbury.

The Rev. Hart-Davis of Christchurch often used to go to America to give lectures. He was the father of Marjorie Gilbertson whose husband founded the garage on the Sidcup by-pass later called Dees and now lost under the new road. Mr. Gilbertson suffered from



asthma and the country aspect of the garage was very beneficial to him. The Gilbertsons lived at 18 Selborne Road, opposite no.19. It was one of the new houses built on the hayfield. Straw was laid in Selborne Road outside Mr. Coath's house when he had pneumonia, as was the custom for terminally ill patients in the 1920s since at that time there was no cure for the disease.

Local doctors included Dr. Duffet, who lived in Hatherley Road and had two sons one of whom became an Admiral in the Navy, and Dr. Miller who lived further down the road. He had a horse and carriage and when he was driven on his rounds he would carry a newspaper in front of him so that he did not have to say, "*Good Morning!*" There was another doctor in Elm Road who had better be nameless: he had twin boys who once held a knife over his head and when he remonstrated with them they ran away. When he pursued them to the end of the road one ran along the High Street and the other ran in the opposite direction along the Main Road!

Mr. Claud Beater was Mrs. Downie's uncle, who had a great sense of humour and was always full of wonderful stories. When she was at home he often took her with him on his business trips by car into Kent and Surrey. On calling at No. 19 he was usually greeted with, "*Here comes Uncle Claud, in his bowler hat.*" He knew the countryside by heart and since he always drove a tourer he would look at the weather and take a route to avoid any rain, so that there was no need to put the roof up. In 1921 Mr. Bunting bought a Morris Oxford tourer, with a thermometer on the radiator that showed an alarming rise in temperature when going up long hills. There was a screen for passengers in the rear seat with an apron to keep off the rain. Both her father and Mrs. Downie learnt to drive it and the family went to

Devon, Wales, Scotland and Norfolk on holiday. They had no car during the slump of the early 1930s but later ran a Vauxhall until 1939.

Mrs. Downie now lives at Witham, Essex, which is quite close to Tolleshunt d'Arcy where her Bunting relatives still live and Tolleshunt Major where her grandfather was Vicar. She often drives herself to Sidcup to visit friends and relatives.

MR. MALCOLM HOOK

(IN HIS OWN WORDS)

My father Frank Hook was born in Wingfield Place, Sidcup and was one of a large family which was well-known in the area. My mother Winifred came to Sidcup from her family home on the Isle of Wight. My parents lived in Woodside Road. I was born in 1936 and now live in Beck Road. When I was a boy there was plenty of farm work to be had in the area and when we were on holiday from school the boys would help out on the various farms along the Main Road. I well remember the numerous shops there were in the High Street when I was growing up. There were two Department Stores - Dawsons and Stangers and half a dozen grocery shops, apart from greengrocers and butchers. One or two banks were also there but no building societies at all, or of course television shops which now make up most of the High Street. It was a pity to see so many of the old large houses pulled down in the district to make way for the so-called "*match boxes*" that make up Sidcup today.

I also remember Smokey Joe. Us boys would talk to him up in the Sydney Woods, Beaverwood, where he used to spend his days when he was not wandering

around the area on his old bicycle. He taught us how to make pipes with bracken for a stem. He used to tell stories of his past life. His parents were buried in Somerset. Sometimes he would go as far as Shooters Hill where there was a large kennel. He could give a certain whistle and set all the dogs barking, causing confusion and noise. He was a harmless man and never caused any trouble as long as he was left to carry on his life as he wished.

I recall the war when I was at Longlands School. When a landmine dropped nearby the blast stripped the trees of many of their branches and also blew down a local aviary. There were lots of pretty and unusual birds sitting on the bare branches. On another occasion when a doodle bug fell in 1944 I remember sheltering under a milkman's horse in Woodside Road. We used to have great fun during the war playing in the bombed houses and on the many bomb sites. I finished my schooling in the Central School in Alma Road.

I was lucky enough to be taken on as an apprentice with Martin's Undertakers where I learnt the trade of letter carving in stone - writing the epitaphs on grave stones. I am one of only fifty people in the country now doing this work as members of the Association of Master Letter Carvers. I am now Vice Chairman of the Association. My wife, who was previously a barmaid, became interested in what I did, learnt the trade and now works with me.

MRS. WHENHAM

I was born in Northcote Road on 26th December 1925. Family tradition has it that my mum overdid the dancing on Christmas Day thus hastening my arrival into this world. Whatever the truth of the story the family connections with Northcote Road span many, many Christmases. I myself lived there up until 1957 when I moved with my husband Denis to Swindon.

My mother was born Laura Adelaide Maud Barnett on 25th July 1893 at Chislehurst. She was one of seven children raised by James Barnett and his wife Agnes Lily (nee Baldry). On the 5th April 1915 Laura married Albert John Saunders at Christ Church, Sidcup. They were already living at 26 Northcote Road then although I am unsure just when the family had moved to that address. Albert had been born in Mile End, Old Town on the 9th June 1888 to William and Jane (nee Nichols).

I remember attending the Woodside Road School before moving on to the Central School for Girls in Alma Road (1936-1940). There was a sweet shop on the corner of Woodside Road and Main Road owned by a Mr. Covey. I used to call in there for my sweets and if my memory serves me correct to sample the ice-cream which he made himself.

My father died in 1938 when I was twelve. I remember going out with him for quite long walks, often on a Sunday morning. My only sister, Lily, had been born in 1917 and she and I can remember what we called the *Seven Stiles Walk*. We would walk through Sydney Woods across Perry Street and then through the Scadbury Fields. It is a few years since I visited Sidcup

but I believe our walk took us out to where St Paul's Cray Estate is now.

As well as earning a living as a tailor my father collected premiums on behalf of the Hearts of Oak Insurance Company and I often accompanied him as he walked out as far as Blackfen to call on policy holders. Although I do not remember my Great Grandfather James Barnett I have been told that he used to break the horses in for Mr. Bentley's Cab trade. His yard was next door to Christ Church. I seem to recall that these premises were at one time a greengrocers owned by Mr Gorringe. My sister's first husband, Bill, worked for Mr. Gorringe.

During the Second World War the ground behind our house was used as allotments. These have now been built on. I'm sure that those people still living in Sidcup will know the name of the estate but it lies between Northcote Road and the A20. It was during the war years that I went with my cousins and friends to dances at The Bull at Birchwood. We would have to walk home afterwards!

At various times during this period processions and parades were held to raise money for the war effort. I can remember taking part in these with Lil and even riding on the cab of a lorry on one occasion. At the end of the war a big Victory Celebration was held. One of the highlights was a Victory Parade which was a procession of floats etc. Our street organised its own float on which my sister and I rode. It used the League of Nations as its theme and was organised by Sid Covill who was one of our neighbours.

In 1940 I started work at a dry-cleaners. They had a factory at Bexleyheath and various branches throughout

the area. At different times I think I worked at every branch of the *1940 Cleaners* as the firm was called. I married in 1951 at Christ Church and my husband and I continued to live with my Mum at Northcote Road. My sisters and one of my Aunts also lived at Northcote Road. The three houses, 26-30 Northcote Road, were all occupied by the family and so the gardens all inter-connected and were virtually treated as one by everyone.

My personal association with Northcote Road finished when I left in 1957 although the family continued to live there for many years. My Mum lived there until she died on a visit to Swindon at Christmas 1979. My sister lived there even after the death of her first husband finally moving out in 1987 when she remarried. She now lives at Darenth with her daughter.

As you can see the family lived in Northcote Road for over 70 years and at various times at least four generations of the family have lived there. My memories of the road are on the whole good ones and I am currently spending the spare time afforded by my retirement tracing my family tree. I am hoping that my research will help to fill in the gaps in my memory and perhaps help me to recall other incidents from my own childhood in Northcote Road. I pity anyone in years to come however, trying to trace my son's family. Whereas the Saunders family spent over 70 years in one of three adjacent houses he and his wife have blessed me with four grandchildren all of whom were born in different parts of the country!

with the parish visiting, which she did not find too congenial and she recalls visiting an old lady in Hadlow House. She entered the house by the conservatory at the back to find the old lady sitting up in bed, reminding her irresistibly of Red Riding Hood! Hadlow House later became Sidcup Library and retained its conservatory until it was all pulled down to make way for the new library. A little further along the High Street was Bank House, on the site of Woolworth's and occupied by the Atkinson family. Mr. H.Q. Atkinson was the manager of Martin's Bank next door and a born raconteur, often greeting his male acquaintances with, "*I say old boy, have you heard this one?*"

On the same side of the High Street was the King's Hall, which was popular for dances and became the Regal cinema in 1929. There was also Gilbert and Sullivan and pantomime performances in the winter. The Cannon cinema still carries on the entertainment tradition here. Other winter recreations included skating on the lakes at Lamorbey and Foots Cray Place and on Chislehurst Ponds, all of which were open to the public. Mrs. Turnbull joined the Guides in the 1920s and on leaving school became a Brownie Pack Leader at St. John's. Miss Bunting (later Mrs. Downie) had started the pack and so many children had joined that the pack had to be divided into two, with Mrs. Downie leading one half and Mrs. Turnbull leading the other half. The Miss Stevens mentioned above was a member of Mrs. Turnbull's pack.

From 1933 until her marriage in 1937 Mrs. Turnbull worked as a secretary in Watts Ward, part of the physiotherapy department of the Cottage Hospital which stood where the Clinic is in Granville Road. She became acquainted with the local doctors, such as Dr. Duncan Callendar, who lived at 20 Hatherley Road, Dr. Jim

Barnard and Dr. Duffet. She also recalls that when Dr. Tom Callendar, who lived at 29 Station Road, was in his last illness in 1927 straw was laid on the road, which deadened the noise of horse-drawn traffic quite effectively. Watts Ward was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Watts of Holbrook House on St. Paul's Cray Common. Their daughter Marie was a talented pianist who developed trouble with her hands. She went for help to Miss Vera Day, the head of physiotherapy at the Cottage Hospital, whose treatment was so successful that in gratitude the Watts donated the ward as an annexe to the hospital. Miss Day was in charge of Watts Ward until the National Health Service was introduced in 1948 but because she had had no formal training and was also deaf she had to leave and work at Queen Mary's Hospital, a case of bureaucracy frustrating talent.

In 1892 the young Basil Spurgin, newly graduated from Cambridge, was appointed as a teacher at Marlborough House School in Chislehurst Road. The school was situated in Marlborough House and Perry House next door and these have now been replaced by two blocks of flats, White Gates and Perry House respectively. Mrs. Turnbull lives in Perry House, so she has returned to the place where her father started in Sidcup a hundred years ago and another wheel has turned full circle.

