DO YOU REMEMBER ?

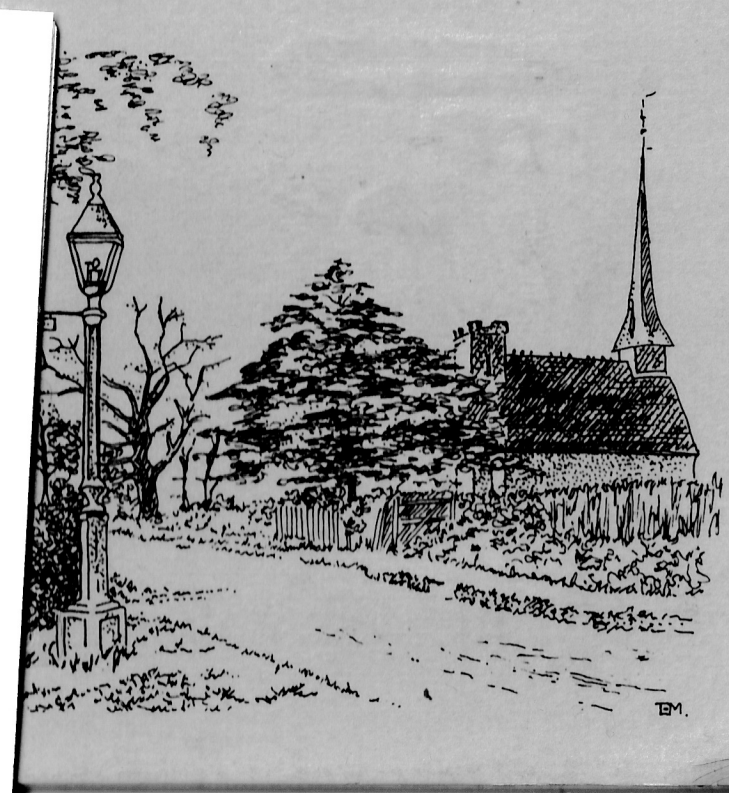
Recollections

of

Blackfen

and

Halfway Street



DO YOU REMEMBER? REMINISCENCES OF EARLY DAYS IN BLACKFEN AND HALFWAY STREET

FOREWORD

At a meeting of the Lamorbey and Sidcup Local History Society's Research Group, Frances Oxley, the secretary, put forward several ideas for projects. As a result, Bess Dzielski, then head librarian of the Blackfen Public Library, suggested inviting local residents who had lived in the area for many years to come to the library and record their memories of their first home in Sidcup. Dr. John Mercer had expressed particular interest in oral history so he was asked to organise the enterprise. Here are the results.

INTRODUCTION

The number of local residents who turned out on a February night exceeded our wildest expectations. The recorders were overwhelmed by the story-tellers. The library even ran out of chairs! Out of the welter of paper had emerged a fascinating kaleidoscope of human experience. Who can say that local history is dull?

Thanks are due to the committee members who helped to plan the evening and to the recorders who coped with the stories. If anyone has been omitted, please accept my apologies. Thanks are due to: Louise Beaver, Gillian Brown, Anne Brunton, Ann Capelin, Bess Dzielski, Norma Huntley, Sheila North, Frances Oxley, Eric Percival, Arthur Turnham and Janet Woods.

Only those accounts are included which formed some kind of continuous narrative and those that applied to Blackfen and Halfway Street. Those about Sidcup itself will have to find their way into another publication. Some of the information collected, though valuable in itself, was too sketchy to be included. This is particularly true of the questionnaires that were completed. To those who came and gave accounts, but who are not recorded in these pages, my thanks and apologies. There is a list at the end of all who took part in any way so that there will be some consolation to those who might have expected more of their experiences to be tolc

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

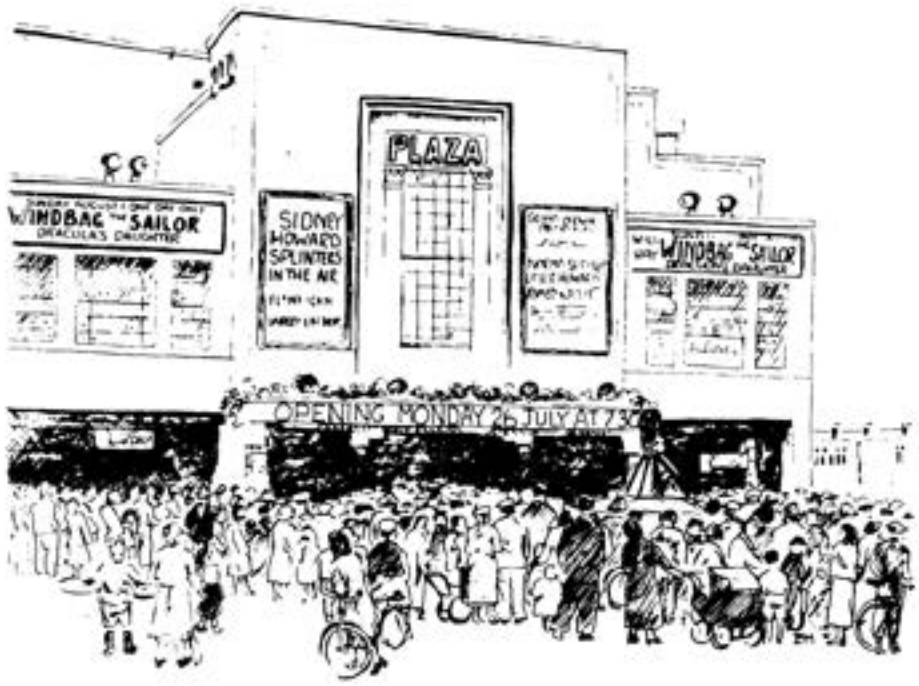
MARY PERCIVAL

MRS. P. STREETS

(In her own words.) "I moved to Holbeach Gardens with my parents in 1941. I loved it there and can remember playing in the woods at the back and being able to walk through to Avery Hill. During the War the Canadians were camped there with smoke 'carts' and used to make quite a fuss of we children. At the back of our house was an orchard which stretched the length of our road and further down to the beginning of the woods. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips kept the place and we used to throw our ball over the fence deliberately, go all the way up the road and round the corner up to her bungalow front door and ask if we could retrieve the ball. She said we could but not to touch any apples on the trees only to pick the windfalls. What we used to do was to shake the trees and then pick up the windfalls. I was a pupil at Days Lane School and to my mind there has never been another headmaster quite like Mr. Watts. I enjoyed every minute of my time there. After the War in 1945 because I had not been evacuated I was invited to join other children for two weeks holiday in 'far off Worplesden, near Guildford'. My parents were worried about my going because I was such a little girl, but Mr. Watts persuaded them that I would be in good hands. After that I was always known to him as 'the little girl whose parents were worried about her going to Guildford'. I used to see Mr. Watts almost every evening when I eventually went to Sidcup Girls Technical School and we often had a laugh about it.

During the War when an air raid occurred, we were ushered into the school shelters at the back of the playground and I can remember we used to sing 'Ten Green Bottles' and 'One Man Went to Mow' and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves because with Mr. Watts and the teachers' help we were not frightened of what was going on. The Plaza Cinema was our local Saturday morning cinema and I went for many years. The Manager used to organise different events, one was a collection of waste paper when about four friends and I drove our neighbours mad for the stuff and arrived at the cinema car park with a pram full of paper to find that the winner was the son of a removal firm owner, Mr. Beckwith, who lived in Willersley Close, with his father's van full of waste paper. The Manager was an ideal person for the job and kept us youngsters in good order. He lived in Lyndon Avenue, but I cannot remember his name. It might have been a Mr. French?

Smokey Joe I remember more from my days in Foots Cray. He used to stand outside the parade of shops just by the old Barley Mow (now gone) with his rusty, tyreless bicycle, having lit a fire in an old bucket, dancing and singing away. He was a nuisance but never violent or offensive. Miss Savage, the Fortune Teller, was to us children like a witch. Her home in Fen Grove was full of dogs and cats, most of whom were suffering from distemper or some such disease. The place smelt appallingly and some of the stories related by people who had been inside the house were awful, but the woman certainly had a feeling for fortune telling. She managed to foretell many events correctly. I do remember when the 241 bus ran every five minutes, because at one time I lived near the Sidcup bus garage and if you missed one bus coming out of the garage you could stroll along and another would follow it out."



The Plaza, Blackfen

MR. AND MRS. SMITH SENIOR

Mrs. Smith Senior was nine when her family moved to Ramillies Road from Mitcham. Her family came this way so her father could work at Deptford Power Station. She went to Days Lane School and remembers the official opening of Blackfen Girls School under the headship of Miss Davies. She sang in the school choir on that occasion. The area was full of orchards and there was a ford across Days Lane. During the War she worked at Standard Telephones and Cables in Foots Cray. She remembered that a gas cylinder exploded and everyone believed it to be a German Bomb. Her husband was a Bexley resident and they moved into Rowley Avenue in 1945. He was an accounts clerk in Dartford and travelled there successively over the years by cycle, autocycle, train and finally car.

She and her husband recalled the Plaza Cinema and their son-in-law (another Smith) remembered that when Safeways took over the building the diesel pumps were removed from the basement causing the new Safeways to flood regularly. He recalled falling out of an apple tree in Cedar Avenue and breaking his knee at the age of two. He and his school friends used to play near the Blackfen Library and he remembers the fierce caretaker who used to chase them away, but also offer them sweets, which they happily accepted. Today children are warned against such a practice and he felt they now lived in an age of lost innocence.

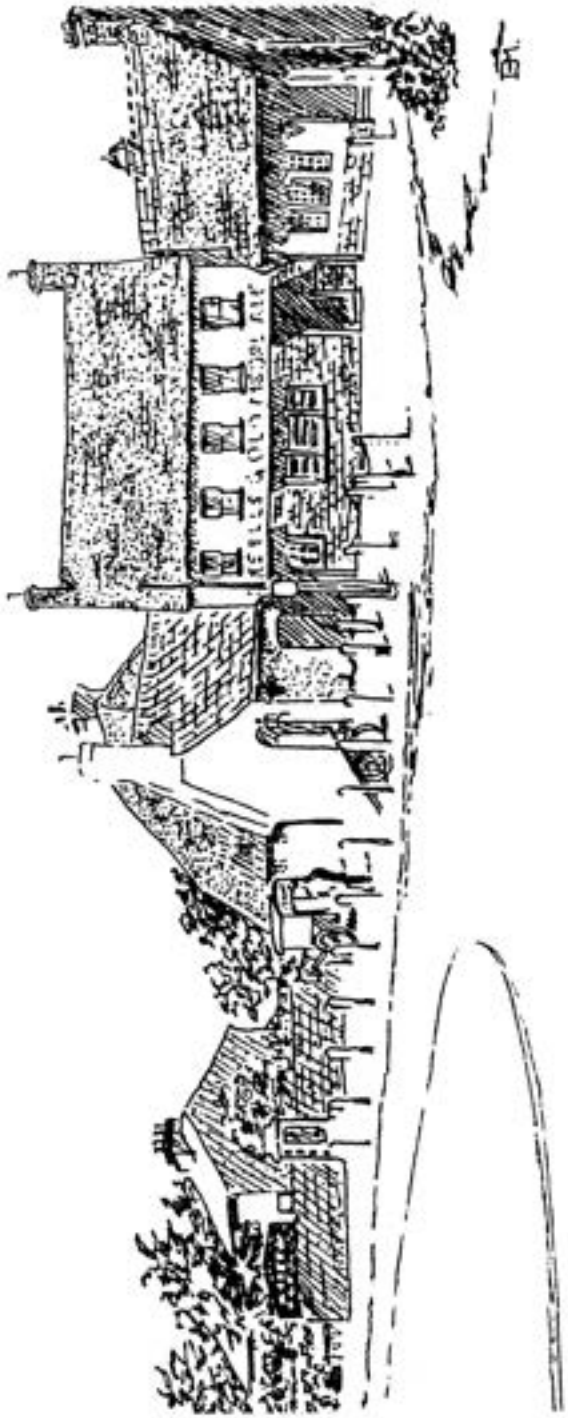
MR. AND MRS. CAMP

Mr. Camp had the first mortgage book of his father with him dated 1932 and the booklet advertising the estate on which he first lived in Ramillies Road. Mr. Camp started work as an office boy in 1943 working from 8.30am until 6pm for £1 a week. Mrs. Camp started work in 1944 at the Royal Artillery Record Office which was located in Foots Cray. She was paid 14s per week on commencement. Mrs. Camp's father, Mr. Fred Kenwood, was 94 and still very active. He was a bus driver and in the early days drove an open top bus, the 21 from Sidcup to London Bridge. It had wooden wheels and a maximum speed of 12mph.

Passengers on the top deck were provided with a canvas sheet to clip over the lap when it rained. One of his stops was at the Carter Paterson depot in Eltham High Street, the site now occupied by Curry's and the Gas Show Rooms, which was one of the last CP depots to give up the use of horses. Mr. Kenwood is still a loyal member of the Co-op and takes the bus from Blackfen to Welling to get his groceries. (It is a general regret that the Blackfen Co-op has been lost.)

MRS. SAVAGE

Mrs. Savage was born at 136 Days Lane. Her great grandfather owned the Woodman. Her parents were from New Eltham. She remembers Westwood Lane when it was just a track and when Danson was a private house. She has memories of playing on the building site of the new houses going up in Boundary Road. She attended Days Lane School under Mr. Watts and went on to Bromley Grammar School. During the War she was evacuated to St. Neots. The children met at Sidcup Place and sent from Sidcup Station. Her uncle was a 'green meat man', which she thinks was the same as a cats meat man. She recalls some personalities of her youth. There was Smokey Joe who played a bugle to raise money. He had two paint tins for tea cups. There was North Cray Kate who wore glasses and a flying helmet and who swore a lot. She was run over and killed. Miss Savage, the fortune teller (no relation of hers) lived in Fen Grove and had lots of cats and dogs. She told fortunes while her dead mother lay in the room. During the War she remembers a doodlebug which killed eleven people in Days Lane. One man was blown off his cycle into a manhole. He was heard calling for help. She had lessons in the air raid shelter at school. At one time there were only two in the class because the others had been evacuated on account of the bombing. When she wanted to join the junior section of the library she had to read to the librarian to prove that she could read. One boy friend said Sidcup reminded him of a Wild West town. He expected someone to pop out from behind a hedge with a gun! Mrs. Savage went dancing at the Kings Hall (later the Regal Cinema) and met her husband there. He was an electrician on the Daily Express. He came from Greenwich. They moved to Burnt Oak Lane and had three sons.



The Woodman, Blackfen

MRS. D. STEVENS (nee PYEFINCH)

(In her own words) "My father was a butcher in Hare Street, Woolwich and one of his customers, a contractor from Silvertown, offered him the use of the farmhouse belonging to Blackfen Farm when he told him how nervous my mother was of the Zeppelin flights and air raids over our district. This Mick Heaslop had bought the two fields, paddock, farm and outbuildings comprising the farm just to dump the residue of a soap works and these white heaps lay on the fields and along Burnt Oak Lane for some years. We moved out to the farm in September 1917, my parents, my younger sister and my mother's youngest brother who worked at Siemens, Charlton and he had to walk daily to Eltham to catch a tram. My father cycled to his shop and carried shopping on it and often a one hundred weight of coal. The First World War being on meant no deliveries apart from an oilman who called weekly to deliver paraffin for the lamps and soap etc. My young uncle was waylaid in Days Lane by gypsies who often camped by Burnt Oak Lane and called upon us for water. As we had to pump every drop and the well often ran dry in summer, my mother would not give them this but offered them rainwater from the two huge galvanised tanks by the back door. We used it, heated up on the range, for all the washing of clothes and persons. We soon found to our dismay that far from escaping the war in some ways it was worse here.

The guns on Woolwich Common fired at the German raiders and shrapnel fell all around us and down our very wide chimneys. I was recovering from measles when we just moved there so the country air soon 'bucked me up' but I did not resume schooling until after Christmas 1917, when I was six years old. Then I had to walk to Bridgen School and a nine year old girl living in the row of cottages alongside the 'Woodman' called for me and took me there and back. We had to take our lunch with us, of course, and ate it at our desks in the classroom warmed with an old stove. It was a hard winter and I remember how glad I was to see the crocuses at last in a cottage near the 'Blackbirds'. We got to know Mr. Harvey at the 'Woodman' and also opposite our house in Days Lane lived Brigadier Martel and his wife, with their children's old Swiss nanny acting now as cook. She suggested that they keep goats which gave plenty of milk and I remember my father being asked if he'd kill one of the kids for meat for the table. I believe we had some too. We kept rabbits for the table and in the fields were three young heifers and a donkey, though who owned them

I never knew. But the donkey just loved my uncle's copper-coloured hair and would follow him around, thinking of carrots I guess, whilst behind walked all three heifers in a single file. In April 1918 my father was at last called up so we moved away and did not return to Blackfen until June 24th 1924.

We'd always longed to go back and my father took us out there often and kept in touch. Then the bungalow that Mr. Heaslop had had put up in Burnt Oak Lane for a schoolmaster friend of his became vacant and we were able to rent it. By now the farm was larger. Fields on either side of Burnt Oak Lane had been acquired and stretched down Days Lane on the left as far as a lovely wood with a stream wandering on its outskirts and under Days Lane. We wandered the fields and woods at every opportunity, helped with the haymaking and corn stooking, picked mushrooms in the lower fields and crab apples in the wood for jelly. The Heaslops now had a foreman to run the farm, Mr. Jerry Kellier. He and 'old Hughie' who milked several cows lived in and 'old Bessie', a Cornishwoman, was housekeeper. A local lad, who lived in the cottage beside the 'Woodman', called Henry, also worked on the farm, pumping water, feeding the pigs, calling in the cows etc. At weekends the Heaslops drove from Silvertown in a huge old touring car and stayed until Sunday night. Being Irish and Catholic, they went to Mass in Sidcup on Sunday mornings and brought back Father O'Knight for lunch and later they would all play cards round the dining table.

We had a daily and a Sunday paper delivered by Miss Reynolds on her cycle. Winter and summer alike she came up our rutted land and all for eight old pence a week! We walked into Eltham or Sidcup for our groceries and most of our vegetables. We fetched the paraffin up Days Lane from the shop near the bottom. We bought our milk from the farm each day and some eggs, I believe, when they had some to spare. They kept ducks and geese besides chickens and a couple of turkeys, but these did not last long. They are delicate creatures and seemed to catch croup. It wasn't called Blackfen for nothing - mists hung around and crept up the fields of an evening from the streams. We were told that victims of the Black Death had been buried in pits there too, but that may have been just old wives tales. My sister and I walked to Pope Street School (now Wybourne) for three months until Christmas 1924. Then we were told to go to Lamorbey School as we lived in Kent and not in the LCC. Mr. George Watts was the headmaster and lived in the adjoining schoolhouse.

Mrs. J. Bolton helped him to teach. She took five classes all in one room and he took the two upper classes again in one room only. The infants were all in a third room taught by a young woman whose name escapes me. Mrs. Bolton taught us all singing and I learnt to care for the 'Toreador's Song' from 'Carmen' because we sang it so often. Mr. Watts took us for 'gym' out in the playground in summer and winter alike. The big boys also learnt to grow vegetables from him who marched them up the road to an allotment near the golf course once a week. On Thursdays we bigger girls walked to Sidcup Station and went to Bexley by train to be taught cooking, laundry and housewifery. We loved this, it made a break for most of these girls who seldom travelled far. Oh! We were taught sewing and knitting very well indeed by Mrs. Bolton. As my sister and I had the farthest to go to school we took our lunch. In winter we'd put a potato each in the ashes of the old anthracite stove in our schoolroom which were ready by lunch time. Also if we took an Oxo cube, Mrs. Watts would pour hot water on it for us to make a warming drink. Being a church school we often had to visit the church across the way for some special occasion. I had been raised a little Presbyterian but soon learned the Creed etc. by heart and still remember a lot of it. I had given up my place at a secondary school gained with a scholarship, for a chance to live again in Blackfen and I never regretted it.

This was a good grounding for life taught at this wee school and though my French, Geometry etc. ceased, still I was not very keen on some of these and came to no harm later in my life. Going to school wasn't too bad in summer as we went up Burnt Oak Lane then turned right across two fields to cut off the huge loop of the lane and rejoined it later by the Orphanage, as we called it, at the tail end of the lane leading into Halfway Street. In winter, however, it was far too muddy that way, besides being too lonely and dark for two girls to get home after school closed at 4pm. So we walked down Days Lane, along Halfway Street to the school. No buses then. In fact I never remember them along there. After I'd left school my sister used to cycle as it was lonely alone on that road. Being so isolated I never got trained in either of the two vocations I wished to work in, either with books or with flowers. So I stayed at home and pumped water and learnt to cook and sew, but later I went to nursing in Bexley from where I cycled home once a week and therefore never used Halfway Street again to know the buses were running there. Also in 1929, the building boom had struck. After Mr. Heaslop died his wife sold the farm

and because our bungalow was plumb in the middle of proposed roads we had to move. My father bought 202 Days Lane and I put the first two letters of his, my mother's and my Christian name together and added my sister's three to spell 'Cheldawyn'. It was corny but meaningful to us. We moved in May 1930 and as I was eighteen and could now do so was taught to drive by Henry who had lost his job at the farm but was better off on the building sites. There were still ditches either side of Days Lane up to the 'Woodman' and after backing into them several times Henry decided the new road at the back of the 'Woodman' would be safer. So I had to hurry up and learn before the Prince of Wales opened it to traffic. Opposite the old Blackfen Farm site the Martels (now Sir Charles and Lady) decided they didn't like things there any more, so they sold their land to another builder and moved to Exmouth. Their parlourmaid married Mr. Kellier and lived nearby for some years - I wonder if they still do? The 'Woodman' was re-built and dear Mr. Harvey, the old landlord with his pet goose, died. Though in what order all this happened I now forget. We had buses along Blackfen Road at last and we could go to Eltham for 2d and Lewisham for 5d. We now went to the pictures every Thursday on my father's day off. Miss Reynolds' brother married the girl he'd courted for years when one of the cottages shown in the picture above the Power Petrol sign became vacant. I believe his parents lived in one of the cottages too.

My father died suddenly in December 1935 so my mother sold our home the next year when it was found that my sister had a spot on her lung. They moved to Deal and I to Croydon to get married. I really must return one day to see dear old Blackfen and all its memories now that I am the only one left."

MR. AND MRS. E.J. WICKENDEN

Mr. and Mrs. Wickenden moved to Halfway Street from Deptford in 1937. They took a greengrocer's shop and lived over it from the day they were married until the Second World War when Mr. Wickenden went into the army and they moved to Norfolk Crescent. The area was being built up when they moved into the shop and all the residents were young together. They remembered some characters who used to come into the shop. There was a Mrs. Savage and her two daughters who they used to call 'the ugly sisters'. They were quite eccentric! They had many cats in the house which made it smelly and very unpleasant. One of the daughters was a fortune-teller. A cousin of Mrs. Wickenden wanted to have her fortune told so Miss Savage was invited into the sitting room above the shop for the session to avoid the cousin having to go into the cat-ridden home. Mr. Savage, the father, was a well-spoken man who had been a shirt maker. He had seen better times and often had traces of food on his dicky shirt. During the early part of the war Mr. Savage came to the door of the Wickenden's in the middle of the night. He had a lighted newspaper in his hand despite the blackout. He said "Do you have a shilling for the gas?"

Mr. Wickenden's reply was short, sharp and unprintable! One local resident was a woman who rode a white bicycle. She was not in the least poor, but was close with her money. A box of mustard and cress sold in the shop for tuppence. She demanded half the box. Mr. Wickenden went up to the Borough Market for his stock often leaving at 5.30am. He had a new Ford van in 1937. On Sunday mornings he sold shrimps and winkles in the shop to men only. When they moved later to Days Lane, Fen Grove was an unadopted road with a ditch down the middle. Mr. Wickenden observed some funny incidents. On one occasion there was a coalman on the lefthand side of the ditch endeavouring to deliver a one hundredweight sack of coal to a house on the other side. The only way to cross was to walk over a narrow, wobbly plank. As the coalman hesitated on the plank he lost his balance and fell into the ditch. On another occasion a van owned by the Princess Laundry got stuck in Fen Grove. Mr. Wickenden fetched his van and told his wife he was rescuing 'The Princess'.

MRS. B. STENNETT

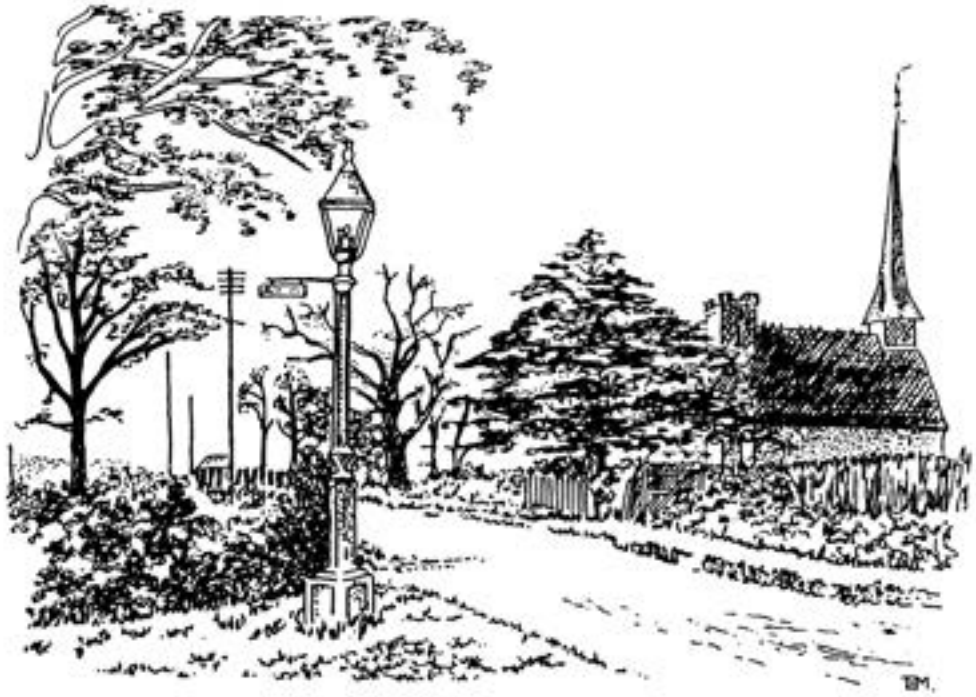
Mrs. Stennett and her parents moved into Blackfen Road from Blackheath in 1930. They were the first people to occupy a bungalow there. There was no water and no electricity until the workmen had finished the row. Water at that time was obtained from a tap along the road. Oil lamps and candles were used for lighting and a primus stove for cooking. Later gas was laid on and her father had a coke fire built in the kitchen. Her father had to walk to Eltham Park Station until Falconwood was opened. She used to see huntsmen go by at the back of the bungalow before Lyndon Avenue was built. She used to pick blackberries where Curran Avenue is now beside a stream that is now piped under the road. Opposite there was a small shed where a man sat selling petrol from a single pump. Next to it was a horse trough where the big dray horses used to stop for a drink after taking beer to the Woodman.

At five years of age Mrs. Stennett was sent to a small private school called Pernavena, run by Mr. and Mrs. Ashdown.

They were a well known couple before the War who contributed a great deal to the community. They taught at the school; gave dancing lessons on a Saturday morning and also gave evening typing lessons.

At eight years she transferred to Days Lane Junior School. She joined the Girl Guides and met in a green hut which is now the Church of the Good Shepherd. She collected paper for salvage in a twin push chair (her brothers) and was awarded two certificates for the large amount that she collected. Her grandfather worked at Graces Farm opposite Avery Hill Park. She began work on a farm in Old Bexley and was paid £1.19.9 1/2p for a fifty-two hour week. She remembers some of the shops opening in Blackfen. Mr. Pointer was a dairyman who delivered milk in churns. Mr. Britton was a butcher by Boundary Road. He would call on Monday for orders and deliver on Wednesday and Saturday. Mr. Shefferd opened the first grocer's shop in Blackfen.

Mrs. Stennett's mother, now aged 84, has happy memories of the early days. She found Blackfen, known then as Sidcup North, delightful countryside, consisting of narrow lanes and woods and many streams. As the housing grew, lovely trees were cut down and they were allowed to take them for line posts some of which are still in use. Small houses were quickly built on the cleared land and new roads made. She records that she and her husband were pleased to come to Blackfen when they did so that the family of four children can look back to recall the fun they had swinging on the trees in the woods and enjoying the country picnics and walks.



Blackfen Road from Blendon

MRS. F.J. KENWOOD

This lady had an aunt, a Miss Reynolds, who ran the original Post Office in Blackfen. Her grandfather and grandmother came from Faversham in 1907/08. Her grandfather found work on the farm which is now Burleigh Avenue. There are two cottages, Westwood Cottages, on the corner and this is where they lived. The farm house itself was at what is now known as the Green, Falconwood and the fields stretched as far as Bellegrove Road, Welling. Her grandfather worked on the farm in the day and used to go to Covent Garden from 9.30pm until 2.00am, grabbing what sleep he could. Miss Reynolds had the Post Office built at 108 Blackfen Road in 1921 and this was extended into a corrugated roofed lock-up shop which was opened as a general store in 1925. Miss Reynolds began by cycling into New Eltham to collect six newspapers daily and the paper round developed from this.

This Post Office was still there when World War II began as it was bombed to the ground and Miss Reynolds made two subsequent moves with the Post Office before returning to the original site after the war, when it was known as the Woodlands Road Post Office. A large quantity of silver coins were found in the charred ruins when rebuilding started. Before the war, the Post Office was subject to an armed robbery. A young man came in and looked around, and then returned and pulled a gun. However, several customers came into the shop and the robber took fright and ran away. The land to the south of the shop was farmed by Mr. Elms of Days Lane Farm, and Sir Charles Martel lived at Queenswood House which was approached from Blackfen Road down a driveway. Miss Reynolds remembered mounted policemen from Shooters Hill patrolling the area as well as the normal 'bobby' from Sidcup Police Station. She (the aunt) attended Lamorbey CE School in Hurst Road.

MR. AND MRS. BATER

Mr. and Mrs. Bater came to Blackfen from Dulwich in 1936. They still live in the same house in Arlington Close. They got married but did not have a honeymoon as Mr. Bater was ill immediately after the wedding. They finally moved into their home having driven over on a motor bike at weekends to watch it being built and count the days to its completion. Mr. Bater went to work for a London publishing house, Horace Marshall of Blackfriars, now taken over by another company. He used to walk to New Eltham station at first, later he cycled and eventually drove there by car. Holy Redeemer Church was just being built, replacing the tin hut (Mission Hut).

They saw the Baptist Church being built. Days Lane in those early days was just a lane with orchards stretching on each side. They remembered how rural the area was with nightingales in Blackboys Wood and owls to be heard and the dawn chorus every morning. During the war they lost their kitchen door and ceilings when a doodle bug destroyed a row of shops in Halfway Street. This was August Bank Holiday weekend of 1944. A V2 fell in Berwick Crescent killing several people. Their son, Ian, attended Days Lane School and then went on to Hurstmere. He is now a technician in London University and living in the Shooters Hill area. They recalled some of the former medical practitioners. Dr. Unger was in Marlborough Park Avenue, Dr. Abrahamson and Dr. Craven in Halfway Street, and Dr. Griffiths in Oaklands Avenue. They recalled Drs. O'Keeffe, father and son, in Rutland Avenue. Queen Mary's was not a general hospital when they first came to Blackfen. The Cottage Hospital in Granville Road, Sidcup was used.

MRS. V. ALLEN

(In her own words) "I was born in the early Thirties in Valliers Wood Road in the house my parents purchased in 1929 when Sidcup was still a village and the new housing estates were beginning to grow. I believe that area of Sidcup was one of the earliest to be developed. The house cost £550, with a £25 deposit to secure the ground, £5 on moving in. The mortgage was 17s.6d and the rates 2s.6d a week. Previously they had rented a house in Leytonstone for 35s.0d a week, so that in those days it was worth purchasing your own property. When my parents moved in my father had a comparatively well paid job as an accountant with St. Dunstan's (The Association for the Blind) and everything was going well. My brother was six months old and I was born in 1931. Then came the slump and in 1933 when my sister was three months old father was out of a job. From then on life took a rather different turn as there was no social security in those days and the dole was practically nil. On knowing that you had a three bedroomed house with three babies you could be told to sleep in one room and take in lodgers to help pay the way. With all the building going on in the area mother soon found lodgers in the form of three burly Irishmen. Although it was not a very large room with a four foot bed, as they had been together since leaving Ireland two years previously they decided it would suit them.

Mother says they were ideal lodgers and they stayed for about eighteen months. After that we had a succession of lodgers up until the war in 1939. One of my earliest recollections before I went to school is sitting on the chair in the kitchen whilst mother did the washing in the old-fashioned copper. There would be a separate zinc bath filled with starch water - everything had to be rinsed by hand in cold water. The clothes were then passed through the mangle. All the time this was going on mother was helping me to learn with the aid of books brought home from school by my elder brother Peter. I can still remember the books with their bright blue covers. All the consonants were in black, with the vowels picked out in red and brightly coloured pictures. Consequently when I went to Halfway Street School I had only to pass through six of the cards by which we were taught before being put on to my first primer. Another highlight on a Monday was the grocery van that used to call and we were allowed to spend a halfpenny on sweets. You had quite a choice for that grand sum. Another regular caller was the rag and bone man from whom you could

have a small toy or a goldfish in a bowl. Unfortunately with money being so short whenever mother asked me to go out to him (she never went herself) we had to get a penny for the rags so that she could buy some suet from the butcher to make us a suet pudding for our dinner with some Oxo gravy. When reminiscing recently with my sister we wondered where my mother used to find the rags to sell as we were hard up anyway. Still that is the way many ordinary people had to live before the war and the coming of the welfare state. Still it was a happy childhood and I do not remember feeling deprived or of ever being really hungry. My father had an uncle who had no family of his own and he used to send my mother £5 every quarter with strict instructions when he sent the one during the summer that we were to have a holiday with it! Mother would pack the large trunk with our clothes. I remember she used to knit our swim suits and I imagine they must have been a pretty sight once they were wet and we had been in and out of the sea several times. We spent quite a few holidays at Bognor Regis where we had what used to be called 'rooms with attendance'. This meant that you paid £1 to the landlady for the use of a parlour and bedroom. You bought your own food, but she would do the cooking.

We spent all day on the beach. In those days the summers seemed to be long and hot. Sometimes we would go home for a cooked lunch and then have a picnic tea on the beach, other days vice versa. We usually went in September when the terms were cheaper and one year when we were away on my sixth birthday in September I remember being taken as a treat to the pictures to see "Little Lord Fauntleroy". But back to what I recall of Sidcup in those far off days. The 228 bus used to take us to the High Street. It was a single decker and the scene was different to today with fewer houses in Halfway Street and some of the side roads not yet developed. In Halfway Street itself at the end of our road we had a grocer/general store run by Mrs. Wayling, next door was the United Dairies. On the opposite corner was Groves, the butcher, and on the other side opposite Days Lane was a greengrocery business owned by the Grace family. Later shops were Bacon's ironmongery, Targett's the chemist, Shiers the newsagent (the last two shops are still in the same line of business but under different management). Bells the butchers is still there, but run now by the son*. Along the next parade was Chaplin's the grocers, and a haberdashers/drapers. I also remember a penny library called 'Bobbies' which was owned by Mrs. H. Robinson-Cleaver, the wife of the celebrated cinema organist who at that time lived in one of the larger

houses in Halfway Street. My mother taught the piano and violin and she once asked my mother if she could teach her singing. I mention the piano and I was brought up in a musical household. Mother used to charge one shilling for a thirty minute lesson and would be teaching each evening from 4.00 until 9.30 and on Saturday for about four hours. Wednesdays were violin days and how I used to hate the sound of violins being played by inexpert youngsters. Being taught music in school then consisted of singing. The orchestras and the marvellous opportunities there are today for children did not come about until the late 1950's. Mother continued to teach until 1968, two years before she died. My niece has inherited the musical talent being head of music at Cleve Park School and also teaching privately at her home. I never really took to music. I suppose because we were always made to practise either in the morning before school or during the holidays before we were allowed out to play. I always envied the pupils knocking at the door with their music cases saying they had come for their lesson and perhaps if someone else had taught me it might have been a different story. My father was also musical and when Holy Redeemer Church was built in Days Lane in 1934 he was offered the position of organist, a post he held until shortly before his death in 1977. He retired three times, but was asked to return as a replacement was difficult to find."

* Subsequently the son has retired and it is now a carpet shop.

The Black Horse, Halfway Street

MR. AND MRS. A.B. CRANE

Mr. Crane was born in Peckham but moved with his family to Sidcup in 1935. He went to Days Lane School and later transferred to Dartford Grammar School after passing the entrance examination. This was in two parts; first a written examination and second an oral. Mr. Crane recalls that one of the oral questions was 'What are the names of all the radio newsreaders?' While at the junior school Mr. Crane recalls collecting the milk and savings stamps money and taking it up to the dairy and Post Office at Blackfen. There was no fear for the safety of the boys or the money. He also remembers playing stoolball at Days Lane, a game which used to be popular in schools and played by both boys and girls. Later it was permissible for the older boys to take a couple of weeks off school in order to do some work. He remembers being a telegraph boy. During the War most of the male teachers were called up. To fill the gaps elderly teachers came out of retirement and married women could return to their former teaching jobs. A part-time teacher at Dartford was a serving soldier who, for reasons best known to himself, tried to ban cricket and substitute baseball. His efforts were in vain! A lot of time in 1940/41 was spent in air raid shelters. He remembers going down into a bomb crater filled with water through which the top of an Anderson shelter was poking. When the air raid wardens saw him they shouted to him to come out because there were still bodies there.

The horror of the doodlebugs (or flying bombs) was especially vivid. The first night they came over it was thought that planes had been shot down and crashed. A few days later, a neighbour claimed that they were Hitler's secret weapon. Her husband knew this because he was in the police force. Although she was laughed down at the time, what she had said proved to be true. There was an anti-aircraft site on what was the polo field (now part of the grounds of Bexley Grammar School) and there were mobile AA guns on the roads in the area. One suspected unexploded bomb proved to be an AA shell. Where Mr. and Mrs. Crane live now in Valliers Wood Road a flying bomb had exploded. Digging up his garden Mr. Crane came across an Austin Seven car lying on its side. An apple tree now grows on top of it.

They recalled two local clergymen. The Rev. Parker-Jones was curate at Holy Redeemer. He lived in Braundton Avenue and was an active and popular man. He died tragically trying to rescue a boy, Tom Downer, from drowning. The next curate, the Rev. Shepherd Walwyn was blind, but this did not stop him finding his way around the parish with his white stick. Mr. Crane started his working life in publishing in the City. He served with the RAF in Aden as a dental orderly where he was also involved in entertaining as an organist. On his return he worked first for the Metropolitan Water Board and then in the Receiving Office in Sidcup. Someone noticed his ability with sketching and encouraged him to become a draughtsman, the job he retained until he retired. Mrs. Crane came to the district in 1948 and married in 1954. She first worked for the Westminster Bank and then as reference librarian for the News Chronicle until her daughter was born. She was also a musician and now does part-time music teaching.

MRS. LE GOUAIS

Mrs. Le Gouais lived in Braundton Avenue from May 1933 until 1977.

Before she was married she worked as a teacher in Plumstead, but on marriage she had to leave teaching. Her husband, whose family originated in France, worked in the Woolwich Arsenal beginning as an apprentice engineer. She and her husband were living in a flat in Foots Cray and were looking for a house when they saw the Hollies Estate being built (Willersley Avenue, Braundton Avenue, Woodlands Avenue). The builder, Mr. Smith, put a wooden fence across the unadopted road to stop other builders' lorries using it. She remembers the house that stood on the British Telecom site (Lamorbey House). She remembers a doodlebug raid as she was pushing her pram from the Three Blackbirds to home. Her husband was at home the day the Arsenal was bombed. Mrs. Le Gouais had three children. The girl went to St. Stephens at Welling and when she was five she would come home by herself on the bus for lunch. She went on to St. Josephs at Abbey Wood and the two boys went to St. Josephs at Blackheath. Two became teachers and one a civil engineer. Mrs. Le Gouais was formerly secretary of the Sidcup Symphony Orchestra.

The Bridge at Lamorbey

MRS. B. WATKINS

Mrs. Watkins was born in Beech Avenue in 1933 in the house where her mother still lives. She went to Days Lane School from 1938 until 1944 and she has many memories of the school during the war. There was gas mask practice (she still has her gas mask). The children sung 'Ten Green Bottles' in the school shelters to drown the noise of the air raids. There was a bomb in Willersley Avenue (behind where she now lives) on the ambulance station. The bomb in Berwick Crescent, where her twin friends lived, killed Beryl and her mother and the other twin, Josie,was badly injured. She remembers Empire Day when she wore her Girls' Life Brigade costume to school and saluted the flag. Mrs. Watkins recalls the Rev. Victor Willis of Days Lane Baptist Church who was known for always being one of the first to help when the bombs were falling.

MRS. AND MRS. E.R. WICKENDEN

Mr. E.R. Wickenden is the son of Mr. and Mrs .E.J. Wickenden. He recalled his boyhood in Blackfen after the war. He attended Days Lane Junior School and remembered some of his teachers. Mr. Watts was the headmaster, Miss Collins and Miss Norman (a redhead) were assistant teachers. He went on to Blackfen Boys School, which became Hurstmere when it moved to Hurst Road. He was head boy in his last year. He recalled many of the masters, Mr. Watts, Mr. Fox, Mr. Donovan and Mr. Sancto.

When he left school he became a clerk for the fruit importers, Howard Chapman, in West Smithfield. He and his parents recalled rival ice-cream men. There was Mr. Jack who made his ices in his garden shed and sold penny cones. He had a tricycle and sold his wares outside the school gates. Then there was Mr. Peck who sold sweets and tobacco as well as ice-cream. He was a grumbly old man with a piece of hair carefully laid over his otherwise bald head. He played the violin very well and also bought and sold violins. They remembered Grooms the bakers with their horse and cart and recalled one occasion when the horse slid all over the place on a slide made in the road by the children.

MRS. E. PRICE

(In her own words) "My first home in Sidcup was at 18 Days Lane. I was brought by my parents in 1919. It was very country then. There were greenhouses opposite and at the top of the road, Halfway Street end, there were orchards and a large house owned by the Grace family. The house was named Cambria and they also owned the woods next to it. Going towards Avery Hill were fields and another wood and then a house with a cobbled courtyard and archways. A family named Brown lived there and it was said it was a stopping place for Dick Turpin. It was called Forest Lodge. Opposite was another big wood which was Crown Property so it was out of bounds to us children. Next to Grace's going towards the station there had been a laundry which was burned down and next to that a wood which we called Laundry Wood. Carrying on the same way was Long Meadow with the River Shuttle running through it where we spent many hours catching newts and tadpoles. Opposite was Fishers Farm with a slaughter house beside the river. Going on past Long Meadow and Wingfield Place was another farm which had oast houses and when the cows came out at about 4pm and we were on our way home from school we would walk with the cowman along Halfway Street, passing the children's homes which were called the Greenwich and Deptford Home then. My father was a railway man with a family of six children when he first moved in, but later our family increased to eight children.

The owner of our house liked to have a tenant to have a regular job such as rail or police. I can remember food not being very plentiful, but with fruit and vegetables from the farms and tomatoes from the greenhouses and blackberries which we children picked, we didn't starve. At the end of our row of houses, going towards Blackfen was a little grocer's shop run by a lady named Mrs. Thomson, where we spent our Saturday halfpennies. Further along was Elms Farm and orchards which stretched a long way down Days Lane. Opposite and just past Corbylands Road were a few houses and then Days Lane Mission Hall where we went to Sunday School and Band of Hope and we attended Lamorbey Church once a month. Next was another big wood. We could enter it from Days Lane and walk through to Halfway Street. Our mother used to take us for a walk in summer evenings. The air was full of scent from honeysuckle. The woods were filled with bluebells and violets and people came from far and wide to pick them. The fields grew daisies, buttercups, milkmaids and

clover. It was lovely for us children. We went to Longlands School which was a long walk for us and we had to cross the railway line. Before the bridge was built two boys were killed. One lived near us in Corbylands Road and he said he would see if the line was clear as it was a foggy September morning. He was killed instantly. His father was a policeman on duty at Lamorbey School seeing the children across the road. The teachers at Longlands were Miss Hill, Mr. Hill and Mr. Morgan. Miss Watson who was the infants teacher was killed in the War. My youngest brother, helping my mother mangle the clothes, slipped and lost the top of his finger. An older brother, visiting his friends in Grace's Wood, was shot by one of the boys accidentally and received thirty-two pellets in his face. The doctors could not get many of them out so they stayed in for life. The boy was not of the Grace family and did not realise the danger of the gun."

Mrs.Price's first job was at Heath's, a factory at New Eltham. She sprayed medical instruments. She was laid off when Stanley's took over. She worked for a time at a radio factory and then went to the Station Hotel where the Iron Horse now stands. She got the sack when she was discovered somersaulting on one of the beds. She married a Foots Cray man who worked in engineering for Stones of Charlton. Mrs. Price's sister-in-law married one of the war victims who had plastic surgery at Queen Mary's Hospital.

(Cambria Close, Forest Way and Longmeadow Road are clues to where these places once were: Ed.)

MRS. G. SMITH

When she and her late husband (who died at ninety) moved into Burnt Oak Lane in the early 1930's there was farmland opposite them. They could walk through it to the station. Her mother used to come that way to visit them from Finchley. Burnt Oak Lane was an unmade, rough track with huge trees either side. Ideal Homes began developing and the properties went up at a terrific rate. Mr. and Mrs. Smith came a year before they moved to see the start of the work. There were only two houses then. One was too small and the other too expensive. A year later they returned and almost every house was earmarked for occupancy. Two or three were offered to them. Their choice was built with extras and a few modifications. When they moved in the house was already papered. It was

a wet day and Mrs. Smith had a terrible sick headache. She had to find a chemist! There were no trees around for shade. Near them building was progressing in Somerhill Avenue too, but on one side of the road only from the October. Spaces were left for parks. Under Marlborough Park were air raid shelters. After school, many families took their children and went there every night. There were shelters at the Oval as well, under the present gardens.

The present clinic was a First Aid Post and Gas Cleansing Station. There were no shops at the Oval until the December of the year that they moved in. There were two or three on Blackfen Road, including the Co-op. At Sidcup Station there were three little old shops. The only handy chemist was under the railway bridge - Roadnight's and it is still there. There was an oast house at the corner of Halfway Street where the swimming pool is now. A lot of shopping was delivered. Meat came from Groves of New Eltham. You phoned and they delivered Saturday am. The United Dairies delivered milk. Bread came by horse and cart or van from Grooms and from Ayres at New Eltham. Groceries came from S.W. Essex and Son on the Marechal Neil Parade. Greengroceries came from the farms and a gypsy type horse and cart, twice a week. But it came so late in winter that it was difficult to see what you were buying without light. Those old days were exciting times. There were lots of young families all around for children to play with!

The corner of Halfway Street and Burnt Oak Lane

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