



Bromleag

The journal of the Bromley Borough Local History Society

Issue 60, December 2021



St Mary Cray — a village engulfed by tragedy



**A strange burial
in Beckenham**

**Creation of Bromley's
South Hill Park**

**Farnborough's American
dining experiment**

Bromleag

*The journal of the Bromley Borough
Local History Society*



Contents

Message from our Chairman	5
Members' Evening	
Beckenham history revisited	6
Bromley postage stamp revelations	7
Strange Beckenham burials	9
Handcross tragedy for St Mary Cray and Orpington	11
Tredwells of Bickley and Southborough	21
Charles Darwin JP	23
Ox –in-Flames at Farnborough	24
South Hill Park, Bromley	30

Bromleag is published four times a year. The editor welcomes articles along with illustrations and photographs. These can be emailed or a paper copy.

Items remain the copyright of the authors and do not necessarily reflect Society views. Each contributor is responsible for the content of their article. Articles may be edited to meet the constraints of the journal. Articles are not always used immediately as we try to maintain a balance between research, reminiscences and news and features about different subjects and parts of the borough.

A full **INDEX** of articles in **Bromleag** 1974—2021 can be found at www.bblhs.org.uk

Next journal deadline — 15 January 2022

Meetings January — April 2022

Meetings are held at 7.45 pm on the first Tuesday of the month (unless otherwise stated) from September to July in the Church Hall at

St George's Church in Bickley Park Road, BR1 2BE.

There is a small car park accessed via St George's Road and free street parking in the area. Buses 162 and 269 pass the door and Bickley station is a few minutes walk away. Access is on the flat and there are facilities for the disabled.

Tuesday 4 January Darwin's Garden: a living laboratory — Pam Temple

A volunteer at the garden, Pam looks at why the garden a Down House was so important in Darwin's researches and how it is now being maintained in a way that helps visitors understand his work.

Postponed from November 2021

Tuesday 1 February Civilian Heroism in South London — Dr John Price of Goldsmiths College.

John is a social and cultural historian who takes a "People's History" approach to 19th and 20th-century British history and the history of London. His primary area of research is "everyday" heroism, acts of life-risking bravery, undertaken by civilians in commonplace surroundings.

Tuesday 1 March Bromley welcomes Belgian Refugees — Pam Preedy

On 4 August, 1914 the Germans marched into Belgium expecting no resistance. They had a plan that relied on speed. They were met by opposition which was easily overcome, but slowed the march towards France. This is the story of how families in Belgium fled from the Germans and how many were welcomed in Bromley.

Tuesday 5 April The Mysterious Mr Brown, Orpington's quiet philanthropist — Patrick Hellicar

Do we have your latest email address?

During lockdown we updated our membership list and hopefully we now have everyone's latest email addresses. We contact members by email at least once a month, so if you have not been hearing from us (and wish to do so!), please let us know. A quick note to admin@bblhs.org.uk will do the trick. **Max Batten**

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www.bblhs.org.uk

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Great response as we return to meetings

At the time of penning this report, there have been two live members' meetings at our new venue, St George's Church Hall, Bickley.

Regretfully, due to work commitments away from home, I was unable to attend November's meeting but I understand it was as well attended as the first meeting in October.

Dr Adrian Thomas stepped up to the plate at the last minute in November when the planned speaker had to isolate because of Covid. Adrian gave a talk entitled *50 Years of CT Scanning: A London Development*, and the feedback I have received suggests the talk was enjoyed by all.

The inaugural members' meeting in October in the new hall was tense for the committee as we had no idea how many members would attend or what the general opinion would be about the move to St George's. As it turned out, our concerns were unfounded as we had over 50 attendees and the positive responses received were more than complimentary.

At a fairly late stage in the planning, it was decided to reverse the layout of the hall and arrange the seating and coffee tables, cafe style, with the audiences' backs to the main stage. This facilitated easier access to the tea and coffee counter and also meant that any later arrivals would be able to sit nearer the back without disturbing the already-seated audience.

It is still subject to further developments and I, for one, would like to be able to offer some way for our more-distant or less-mobile members an opportunity to view/attend the meetings online. There are practicalities to overcome and these are well above my "pay grade", so watch this space.

The subject for the talk at the October meeting was *Wandering through the Crays* by Jerry Dowler. The talk was very well received and the audience interacted with Jerry, who was pleased to answer questions. I was personally interested, as someone whose distant relatives came from Cork in Ireland, to hear about the large influx of Irish migrant workers in the early days. I also enjoyed the history up to current times of the Cray Wanderers Football Club. Certainly the early players crossed the social classes with "gentleman" players mixing with the migrant workers.

Our next members' meeting in December will be a mix of talks and Christmas social. We intend presenting two or three talks interspersed with festive snacks etc.

I very much look forward to seeing as many of you as possible.

And to all members, especially those who are unable to join us for this small Christmas celebration, I wish you a Happy Christmas and healthy New Year. I hope you all enjoy this Christmas with friends and family.

David Hanrahan, Chairman

Shedding new light on Beckenham's history

Beckenham 's history has been well researched by historians over the decades but today, with fresh avenues of research available through the internet, Mal Mitchell and Keith Baldwin are adding to our knowledge of the area.

At our members' evening — hopefully our last Zoom meeting — Mal told us how, with the resources available online, they are filling in the gaps and sometimes challenging the conclusions of past researchers. They are also adding to the area history with details of the smaller estates and properties, including Elmers End which he will be writing about in our March 2022 edition.

"We are able to dig into remote archives," said Mal and cited sources such as maps, wills, Close Rolls (medieval administrative records) and Feet of Fines (agreements following disputes over property). They are looking back as far as the Romans and Mal showed us a modern aerial map with the outline of the now "lost" London-to-Lewes Roman road. He said there is a great deal available online but the internet also directs them to archives up and down the country that hold Beckenham material

All their research is being made available in a timeline on

<http://www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk/beckenham.html>

If anyone has anything to add or feels should be amended Mal is keen for you to get in touch at **bpp.friends@gmail.com**

The mystery panelling of Red Lodge

Langley Park is an example of a topic that Keith and Mal are researching.

In the Philadelphia Museum of Art is a "room" of wood panelling said to have come from Red Lodge, a relatively small cottage on the



Langley Park pictured in Edward Hasted's History of Kent, 1776 with towers that may be the remnants of an earlier Tudor house.

old Langley Park estate. Pictures of Langley Park mansion show a Georgian building, but it was either adapted from, or replaced, an older Tudor building. The towers at the front, which disappear in later pictures, are, Mal believes, part of this earlier house. Henry VIII is said to have stayed in Beckenham, possibly with his Squire of the Body, Humphrey Style of Langley. It would have had to be a mansion of some status for Henry to have stayed there.

So did the panelling move to the cottage when the building was modernised or did it actually come from the mansion before it was destroyed by fire in 1913? That's just one of the historical mysteries Mal and Keith continue to explore.

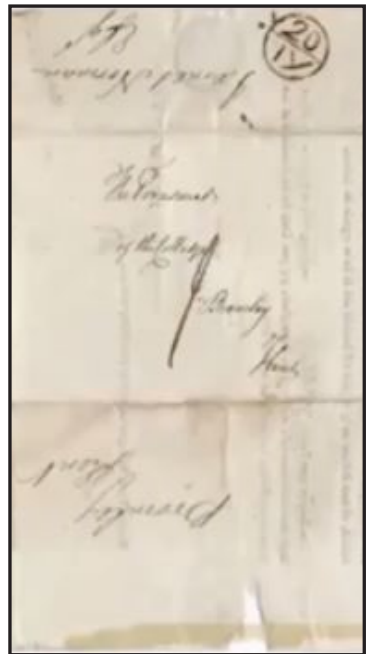
History wrapped up in a postage stamp

It was fascinating to discover how much history can be gleaned from an envelope and a postage stamp. Another speaker at Members' Evening was Dr Adrian Thomas who is past president of the Bromley and Beckenham Philatelic Society. He showed us two envelopes, both connected to the Normans, the banking family of Bromley Common.

The first letter, *pictured right*, 20 July 1782, was to "James Norman Esq, Bromley, Kent". There were so few letters sent that a simple address would be enough to find the recipient. On it is a Bishop Mark, *top right hand corner*, (Bishop was the postmaster general in the 17th century). The stamp shows the day of the month that the letter arrived at the office so the carrier could not delay delivery. Adrian explained that differences in type faces and layout of this stamp can identify the general time-frame of when a letter was sent.

The other side of the letter is addressed to "Treasurer of the College, Bromley Kent". The treasurer was James Norman, to whom the letter was presumably forwarded from the college. The Norman family were involved with the college – which was for widows of clergymen – for nearly two centuries.

Moving on to the 19th century and James' grandson George Warde Norman was vice-chairman of the Bromley Union, which was responsible for the workhouse at



Member's Evening

Farnborough. "He became identified with the work of the Poor Law Guardians and the new workhouse was called 'George Norman's House' by the locals," said Adrian. "He gave a lot back to the community. A lot of rich people took their duty seriously, as did the Normans."

George is the connection with the second letter from 1880, which was addressed to Mr A Bonham Carter, George Norman Esq. Bromley Common". Alfred Bonham Carter was married to George's daughter Mary Henrietta. On this letter was a recognisable postage stamp – Victoria 1d red/brown.

"You can see the beautiful work of the engraver," said Adrian.

The number 324 tells us it is Thurso County Post office in Caithness, September 18, 1880. A triangular inspection mark verifies the weight, the route and the rate — "Quite sophisticated postage," Adrian commented. On the back are hand stamps, one for London and one for Bromley showing when it arrived at each destination. So Alfred Bonham Carter would have known from all this information how long the letter had taken to arrive and where it had come from, before even opening it.



We had two other speakers for the September meeting: Tudor Davies told us about Bromley Congregational Church and Linda Baldwin explained how rural Shortlands developed into a suburb. Both speakers will be expanding their talks for articles in Bromleag next year.

Researching history in Bromley?

The Society's website at www.bblhs.org.uk should be your first online stop .

We have one of the most extensive websites of any local history society, with many excellent local history resources

There is FREE access for everyone, in line with one of the aims of the Society — to record and make available a range of material about the Borough of Bromley that might otherwise be lost. We have been able to do this partly through a generous bequest from the late Jean Tresize.

You will find scanned histories, maps, photos, illustrated articles, street directories and *Bromleag* issues from 1974 —2021 with a fully searchable index.

Burial of a “Ladye” in two parts and a “foole”

There are two very unusual 16th century burials in St George’s Church at Beckenham.

Linda Baldwin found out more about them

5 Nov 1563	DAMSELL, Ladye	(harte and bowells)
10 Nov 1563	DAMSELL	The bodye of ye sayd ladye
22 Apr 1564	ANGER, Robert	Sir Wm Damsell's foole



The monument to Dame Margaret Damsell is described by Robert Borrowman in his 1910 book on Beckenham as a brass of a lady “represented in the loose dress of the period of Queen Mary [Tudor] with embroidered front and puffed and slashed sleeves”.

It is set in the south wall of the chapel near the monument to Sir Humphrey Style. A plain brass below commemorates her sister, Ellen Berney. Margaret Damsell and Ellen Berney were the sisters of Mary, the wife of Edmund Style (1538-1617) of Langley Park in Beckenham parish.

The following year, Sir William Damsell’s “foole”, Robert Anger, was buried at the church.

William Damsell (1520-1582), was a Freeman of the City of London, a member of the Mercers’ Company 1548, Henry VIII’s royal agent at Antwerp, Edward VI’s factor and governor in the Netherlands until 1551. On his return he was appointed Receiver General of the Courts of Wards and Liveries to Edward VI and Mary Tudor. He was Member of Parliament for Wilton 1553, Arundel 1555 and Hastings 1563, under Mary and Elizabeth I. The Receivership was a lucrative role, which had been established during

*Dame Margaret Damsel, memorial brass
by kind permission of
St George’s Church, Beckenham*

Feature

the reign of Henry Tudor, with responsibility for administration and collection of monies owed to the Crown. The Receiver was responsible for matters of feudal dues, wardship of heirs until they reached their majority, and livery, the use of emblems and clothing to denote rank and allegiance.

William was knighted on 1 October 1553 at Queen Mary's coronation, despite having signed Edward's "device" in June 1553 to exclude his "illegitimate" sisters from succession to the throne, which led directly to Lady Jane Grey's short reign. He was said to have been "visited by Cecil [another signatory to Edward's "device"] almost weekly, a habit which was to continue for many years".

William bought Wye College [formerly The College of St Gregory and St Martin at Wye] in Kent in 1553, "but it was at Beckenham that he first settled in the county, his wife being buried there." The location of his Beckenham property is not known.

Borrowman speculates that the separate burial of Dame Margaret's organs and the body may denote that she was embalmed before burial on 10 November. Could this be because she died away from home on 3 November, a week's journey from Beckenham? Perhaps her body was intended to be buried in a family vault, but William changed his mind.

No record survives of any children of the marriage and William's will mentions only nieces, Thomasin Rowper and Dorothy Drew, a great-niece, Sarah Tyler, and a "bastard daughter", Anne Watkins among his beneficiaries.

We don't know what the entry for Robert Anger conveys about his relationship to Sir William. Was he a professional fool, an educated man employed by his patron to provide music, storytelling and physical comedy for family and guests? Or was he a "natural" or "innocent fool", a man with a physical or mental disability, adopted into the family and cared for (as we see in medieval family portraits)? There is no way of telling in which capacity Robert Anger lived in Beckenham, but the fact that he is claimed by William at his death suggests some affection.

Sources:

Bromley Local Studies Library — Transcripts St George's Church Registers
St George's Church Beckenham – with thanks for their kind permission to photograph the memorial

Robert Borrowman, "*Beckenham*" (1910)

Boyd's Inhabitants of London & Family Units 1200-1946

History of Parliament Online (1509-1558)

Records of London's Livery Companies Online (1400 – 1900)

Handcross – a forgotten tragedy

Christine Hellicar

On the morning of 12 July 1906, just before eight o'clock on a glorious summer's day, the Crays and Orpington volunteer fire brigade and their friends set off for their annual day trip.

This year it was Brighton. And it was special.

Eight days earlier, the brigade volunteers voted by a majority of just one to switch from their usual train trip and hire a double-decker open-top Vanguard motor bus.

Shopkeepers, a schoolmaster, two publicans and the local undertaker and his son had tickets. Including the driver and conductor, there were 36 men on board. Many others had wanted to go but had been unable to take a day off work, were ill or lost their jobs and sold their tickets. They were the lucky ones.

Three hours later, nine of the passengers were dead and nine seriously injured in Britain's first major motorised transport accident. Everyone suffered injuries and in the villages of St Mary Cray and Orpington there were 25 new widows and orphans.



City bus: The Vanguard bus that crashed at Handcross was similar to the one above. These had been used in London since 1896. The photo illustrates the fragile nature and potentially dangerous construction of the vehicle, which was made by Milnes-Daimler.

Feature

Fourteen-year-old William Hutchins — whose father died that day — was the youngest person on the bus. He loved the new motor transport and when not at school worked for the local motor and cycle engineer, Thomas Hoar.

He described how the passengers boarded at several stops, including Reynolds Cross in St Mary Cray and Moorfield Road, Orpington, with a final stop outside the “Maxwell Arms” near Orpington Station to pick up the last passengers. “On proceeding up Station Hill [Orpington] the driver stopped and done [sic] up some nuts. On going up Swan Hill, West Wickham it stopped dead once, most of the passengers walked up this hill ... several of the passengers made remarks about the car swaying especially round corners,” William reported in his written statement for the inquest

There had been problems from the start, as recorded in the inquest testimony of George Samuel Smith, a St Mary Cray grocer who was travelling on the top deck. He was thrown from the bus into a bramble bush, which cushioned his fall. The bus, he said, should have left St Mary Cray at 7.15 am but it was nearer eight o’clock before they got going, because of “mechanical problems”.

Smith recalled that at the “Maxwell Arms” there was “smoke coming out from under the bonnet” and driver Henry Blakeman had to make adjustments. Survivor Edward Tear’s evidence to the inquest recalled this stop: “[The bus] was smoking from the front ... the driver lifted the footboard, and wood which was near the clutch was on fire, smouldering.”

At Redhill the Vanguard was seen swerving violently and only just missed a



pavement at Horley an inquest witness said, adding: "It was dangerously top heavy and I noticed there were several people standing on top." With the beautiful weather, 24 passengers had chosen the open top deck and only nine and the driver were inside.

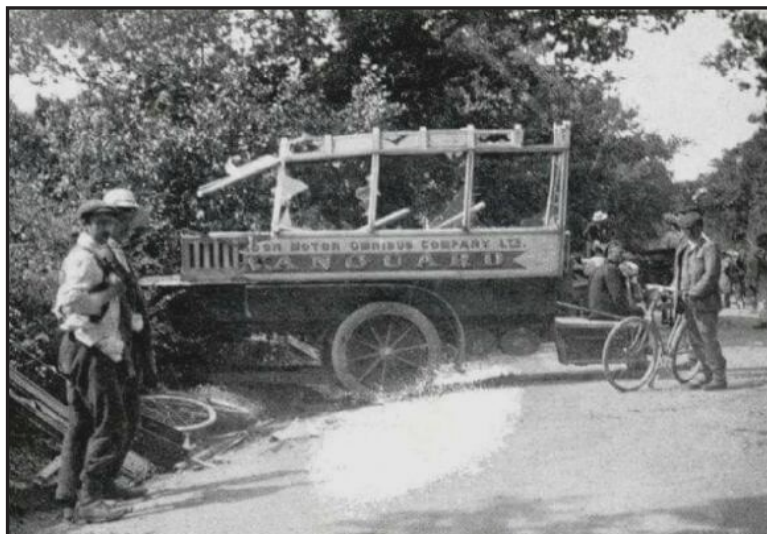
Just before 11am the bus passed the "Red Lion" and began the 300-foot descent of Handcross Hill in Sussex. It was travelling at 12 mph but quickly gathered speed.

George Smith said: "We passed the "Red Lion" at 12 mph. After 100 yard [on the hill] the driver applied the brakes and nothing happened. The car went at a terrific rate and a lot of pieces of iron fell out as though something gone wrong."

Next day, Friday 13 July , *The Times* reported: "About halfway down the hill the brakes and gear broke and the vehicle dashed down with increasing momentum. It swayed from side to side of the road and about 100 yards beyond the spot where the breakage took place crashed into a large tree ... the superstructure and deckload of passengers were hurled into the wood. The body of the omnibus and engine rebounded on to the road, only to drive into the bank again a little further down the road. The omnibus was completely wrecked and lay in two heaps of debris. The bus was travelling at 50 mph". According to the inquest, the speed at the time of the crash was probably nearer 40 mph.

After the crash the dead, the injured and the omnibus were removed to the nearby "Red Lion". That day the pub became a hospital, its stables a mortuary. And for two weeks it was a makeshift coroner's court, set up in tents in the grounds. The hotel was to feature in many of the postcards published in the following days.

Within hours of the crash, pictures of the wreckage had been turned into postcards or were splashed across the national newspapers the following day. They show how the top deck was completely demolished



Feature

In the days and weeks that followed, Handcross Hill, the shattered coach, the “Red Lion Inn” and the villages of Orpington and St Mary Cray were the focus of national attention and the bereaved of the two villages had to endure personal tragedy in the full glare of nationwide publicity.

It was a massive story, not only because of the loss of life and the horror of the crash but also because it was Britain’s first major bus crash and the greatest disaster to occur on English roads since the advent of the motor car.

The motor car had been legalised 10 years earlier and while buses had been introduced successfully in London, the London Omnibus Company had established the first London-to-Brighton service only the previous year.

Those who died instantly or in the hours following the crash, were: from St Mary Cray, 42 year-old baker Arthur Savage; draper William Vann, 41; basket maker, Edward Packman, 38; clothier Herbert Baker, 43 and the local undertaker 42 year-old Henry Hutchins. All had shops on the High Street.

From the New Town area between St Mary Cray and Orpington were baker Thomas Francis, 49 and the landlord of the “Anglesea Arms”, John French, 32. The final St Mary Cray death was Solomon Epsom, 48, who had a grocer’s shop at Poverest.

The two from Orpington who died were another baker, Thomas Francis, 49, and the youngest fatality, Henry Burch, 26, who was a grocer on Orpington High Street.

Some died when they were entangled in the tree, others after they were thrown from the top deck. Some were unrecognisable. For many survivors, the physical and psychological scars would last a lifetime.

The Times reported: “One of the dead, Mr Harry Hutchins, the undertaker, was accompanied by his son, a boy who jumped off the omnibus and escaped with a few cuts. The lad was found crying for his father and his distress was uncontrollable on finding that he had been killed. He refused to leave the body until it was removed to the hotel.”

A young cyclist who had been tail-gating the bus earlier, witnessed the crash: “The omnibus had passed him in a cloud of dust ... he saw bodies of dead and injured people lying in the roadway and the omnibus a complete wreck in a hedge, pinned between two trees,” *The Times* reported.

The cyclist went for help, as did the driver of a passing horse and trap. Dr Sidney Matthews was on his rounds in the area and was at the scene some 10 minutes later. Local hospitals sent doctors but Dr Matthews was the only professional medical help for more than an hour and a half until nursing staff and other doctors arrived by car from Sussex Hospital.

Men working in a nearby brickyard helped the doctor by cutting pieces from the wreckage to make splints, and bed linen from the “Red Lion” was torn up for bandages. Police Sergeant Huntley told the inquest: “Under the doctor’s instructions

they did what they could to lift the injured into carts and take them to the 'Red Lion Hotel'."

The news reaches St Mary Cray and Orpington

It was not until one o'clock that the news reached Orpington and St Mary Cray by telegram. The full extent of the tragedy took time to unfold, some details only reaching the villages through that day's evening newspapers.

The story was everywhere. Next day it was on the front page of virtually all the UK national papers. The *Daily Mirror* devoted its front page to four pictures of the smashed bus. As the week progressed, the tragedy was covered in detail in regional papers (with copy provided by news agencies) and was picked up as far away as Australia. Many reports were far more graphic than *The Times's* coverage.

There were also dozens of photographs, like those on *Pages 12 and 13* taken just hours after the accident. Some were taken by local professional photographers, but others – given the poor quality – were probably snapped on Box Brownies by local residents.

The pictures were on sale the same day. The message on the back of one postcard read: "These were out last night by 10.00 pm, the accident was in the afternoon. KW"

Reporters were soon not only at Handcross but also at St Mary Cray and Orpington. The following report in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* would have been provided by an agency reporter or bought in from one of the national newspapers.

"Consternation and the profoundest sorrow filled the two villages of Orpington and St Mary Cray when the news of the terrible affair reached the residents. Only a few miles separates the two hamlets, and the population is sufficiently sparse to allow of a more or less intimate acquaintance with each other. Especially is this the case with the more prominent men, the leaders in local life, and most of the killed and injured were of that class. Many of the men were leading tradesmen, and were all known by name to almost everyone in the district.

"When the news of the accident came there was a widespread feeling of dismay and pain ... the first to receive the news was a young fellow, assistant to Mr TC Hoar, a cycle maker, of Orpington, who arranged the excursion. The telegram was meagre in its information, and did not convey any idea of the nature or extent of the mishap. But little by little and hour after hour news came dropping in, and gradually the full horror of the affair was realised.

"Every survivor of the terrible affair who was able to send a message did so, but they adopted a most touching method of conveying the news and of stating their condition. In no single case do they appear to have telegraphed direct to their wives or relatives. Instead they wired to some friend, who undertook the delicate task of

informing the wife that an accident had occurred, but that her husband was alive and suffering only from some slight injury”.

Inquest at the “Red Lion”

On Saturday, the day after the accident, the inquest was opened at the “Red Lion” where the dead and injured had initially been taken. The men were formally identified to allow the funerals to take place, and the vehicle — now also at the “Red Lion” — to be inspected.

In the next room, injured and watched over by his wife and son, lay 54 year-old Chelsfield school teacher William Bailey. A request by the coroner that “there should be as little noise as possible” was strictly observed,” the *District Times* (covering Bromley and Sidcup) recorded. The death toll rose to 10 as William Bailey died before the day was out. The inquest was adjourned until after the funerals.

When it resumed on 25 June it was in two marquees in the grounds of the “Red Lion” – the costs being borne by the London Motor Bus company – but there was still not room for everyone. Now there were barristers and solicitors appearing for Daimler, the bus company, licensing authorities and the victims’ families.

It was reported at length by the national press and the *District Times*, and the Sussex papers carried parts of the evidence verbatim, particularly that of Orpington cycle and motor engineer Thomas Hoar who had sat near the driver Harry Blakerman



The bus outside the “Red Lion”, Handcross, where it was taken after the accident

for most of the journey. He gave an account of some of the problems incurred on the journey and the actions of the driver. Two other passengers, Joseph Pennington, landlord of "The Artichoke", Orpington, and James Foster, an Orpington job master, gave evidence. But most survivors were too ill or traumatised to attend.

Over three days the jury heard the harrowing evidence of the survivors, mostly as statements read out to the court, followed by that of the early witnesses to the crash and experts on the state of the omnibus.

The jury found that the driver had made an "error of judgement in allowing the bus to attain so high a speed before taking means to check it". But they did not hold anyone responsible.

They were "strongly of the opinion that this type of vehicle is unsuitable for use on country roads". Handcross Hill had been described as a "crumbing old coach road with a dangerous camber".

Other contributory factors were: too many people on the top deck; failure by the gearbox manufacturer; the driver going too fast; the wrong use of a "city" bus on a bad country road.

The mechanical inability of the bus to stand braking at 25 mph was also blamed for the disaster but the coroner said the bus company could not be held liable for the "hidden flaw" in the gearbox.

Funerals, and villages in mourning

Just days after the crash and before the full inquest was held, the funerals took place. Three men were buried on the Monday but most funerals took place the following day.

On Tuesday, 2,000 people lined the streets in Orpington for the funeral of grocer Henry Burch – the youngest victim. But it was the funeral of Henry Hutchings in St Mary Cray at three o'clock that afternoon that garnered most attention, with 3,000 people present. Two rows of policeman and firemen from far and wide – some full-time and some part-time – marched in front of the hearse.

Henry was the local undertaker, a carpenter, bee-keeper and an active member of the fire brigade. He was also a popular local man. In his younger days he was captain of the Cray Wanderers football team – at that time a very successful London team – and was described by the *District Times* in 1932 as "a fine player who inspired others ... unquenchable optimism".

The coffin was borne to the grave at St Mary Cray cemetery in Henry's own funeral car. The procession was so long it was 15 minutes late arriving at St Mary's Church. "Never before has such a scene been witnessed in the neighbourhood," the *District Times* noted. This was a time when many people from South East London knew St Mary Cray. With easy train access by train, it was a place to come fruit-picking or for

a country day out. Those trippers also came to pay their respects.

The unnamed local reporter from the *District Times* who witnessed the funerals may well have been a member of the local close-knit community. He wrote on 20 July:

“The neighbourhood was under a pall of grief. From end to end the main street presented the aspect of a deep sorrow ... the grief of those near and dear to the dead was pitiable to behold and tears, irresistible tears, trickled down the cheeks of men and women alike as casket after casket was borne through the village streets.

“Every other person one met was in mourning. A funeral in villages like these, where everybody knows everybody else, possessed, under ordinary circumstances a melancholy interest to a degree which is somehow lacking on a similar occasion in a large town, but for a place of limited size to lose, at one fell and untimely blow, so many prominent, well respected, and well liked residents and tradesmen is a calamity with far-reaching effect which the average outsider will find it difficult to gauge.”

The final funeral, that of the Chelsfield schoolmaster William Bailey, took place on the Wednesday in Chelsfield and at his funeral, as at all the others, there were the



Funerals:

The streets and lanes were lined with people paying their respects during the three days of funerals. One of the Orpington funerals is pictured here.

On the front cover of this edition of Bromleag is the funeral procession of Henry Hutchins. An estimated 3,000 mourners attended, with firemen and policemen marching in front of the hearse

leading men of the district, landowners, businessmen and senior officials as well as local parishioners.

It is remarkable how, with just a weekend to sort the logistics, so many “impressive public funerals”, as the *District Times* called them, were arranged, flowers and wreaths fashioned – of which there were clearly hundreds – hearses found, police and firemen assembled, with cover being organised by neighbouring forces and a timetable agreed that would allow each family its own dignified funeral.

Aftermath in the villages

With the verdict of the inquest that “no one was responsible”, The Vanguard company did not accept responsibility and there was no compensation from it or the London Omnibus Company for any of the widows and orphans. It was reported that Vanguard offered to pay for funerals but I have not established if this was accepted.

Although the firemen were insured against accidents in connection with fire duties, the policy did not cover a holiday journey. It was impossible for the village alone to support the bereaved and fundraising began almost immediately. The *District Times* opened a subscription list for a relief fund and The Automobile Club also set up a fund.

The biggest local donor in the first week was Thomas Nash, who owned the St Paul’s Cray paper mill. By the time the inquest opened fully 10 days after the crash they had raised £600 and aimed to reach £2,000. Contributions came from far and wide, including from Harry Gordon Selfridge who had only that year arrived in London from Chicago to open his London department store in Oxford Street.

The Cray and Orpington Volunteer Fire Brigade did not belong to the National Fire Brigade Union but the Sevenoaks Fire Brigade, which did, held a carnival to raise funds for the widows and orphans.

In the end, £2,281-7s- 2d was raised (worth around £1 million today based on income). A trust fund was set up to last 10 years to help provide education and support for the children and assistance for the widows, many of whom were carrying on their husbands’ businesses.

Notices in the *District Times* on 20 August announced: “Maud Baker is carrying on the business with the aid of Mr Mayatt” and “Bertha Hutchins is carrying on the business with Mr A Soloman managing”.

Mementos of the disaster abounded. Medals were struck. Very badly printed. In memoriam cards went on sale. In London, a penny sheet with a melodramatic 12-verse poem by Edward Phillips was sold.

Here are just two of its lines:

*And then those beings, who just before were full of fun and play
A mass of human wreckage in the dusty roadway lay.*

It was not great poetry, nor very sympathetic, but it did raise money for the victims' families.

Legal action was also begun to try to obtain money from the Vanguard Omnibus Company, but that was not pursued.

Life did not return to normal in St Mary Cray for a long time. For many weeks afterwards the district fire brigade was unable to function because only five of the voluntary brigade had not been killed or injured.

Aftermath for motor transport

After the immediate tragedy had ceased to interest the daily press, they continued to discuss motor car and bus design. There were questions in Parliament and the accident was to influence safety regulations drawn up in later years.

Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone was asked whether in the interest of public safety all existing licences on buses should be suspended pending a more rigid system of inspection. The Local Government Board addressed the need for buses to install a separate conductor's brake (hand brake). But lessons learnt were not followed through very quickly and there was an accident in similar circumstances in County Durham five years later. Again, 10 men were killed.

The History of British Bus Services, by John Hibbs, 1968, records: "It set back the development of long distance coach travel in Britain by many years. Had it not been for the Handcross disaster the history of the public transport industry in this country would no doubt be different.

"Public confidence in the idea of long distance bus travel was shaken by the disaster ... It also had repercussions on the development of the motor bus, the design of the body, which was an enlarged copy of old horse-drawn vehicles, became a topic of discussion in the national press ... [the accident] would not be remembered were it not for its effect on the development of the industry."

And that is almost true.

The *District Times* said of Henry Hutchins's funeral: "The mournful procession was one that will not soon be forgotten." Anniversaries of the crash were marked for many years in the local press. On the 80th anniversary in 1986 there were still villagers around who recalled in the *Orpington Times* how their fathers "escaped" the tragedy either because they were ill or, as in the case of Gladys Wise's father, were out of work and sold their tickets for the outing.

But it is now only a very nebulous memory in St Mary Cray. In 2021 there are very few families left in the area who lost great grandfathers and relatives in the crash. Pictures of the accident and the funerals pop up on social media and there is always surprise. "Why does no-one know about this accident?" is a common question.

Perhaps the memory has faded because there is no memorial to the men who died. At Handcross, a simple metal cross on a fence marked the spot for many years but

that was lost in road-widening, though details of the accident are recorded and pictured in detail on a local website and at the “Red Lion”.

In Orpington and St Mary Cray it is only recalled in the old families and in pictures on a website. There are a few personal gravestones in the churchyard at All Saints, Orpington, and at the St Mary Cray cemetery. Some have not survived, however.

But there was never a memorial in St Mary Cray or Orpington to tell new generations about the tragedy that devastated the villages on 12 July 1906.

Sources

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Sevenoaks Chronicle

The Tredwells of Whitehall Farm

Having just read the interesting article about George Wythes in the latest Bromleag, I was intrigued by the mention of a “Mr Treadwell” who lived in Southlands Road and farmed an area known as Whitehall and Page Heath, and who was known to Mr Wythes.

Intrigued because one of my great grandmothers was Emily Jane Treadwell , born 1846 in Dartford, who married Jesse Gratwick, born 1842. Jesse and Emily moved to London and two generations later my direct Gratwick forebears moved to the Bromley North area.

But Emily's father, Thomas Treadwell (a gardener by occupation, according to the 1851 census), evidently moved to Bromley temporarily with his third wife Mary Ann Saddler as their oldest child Henry was born in Bromley in 1851. Then the family moved to Islington.

While I don't consider my Emily or her father were connected to “Mr Treadwell”, having Treadwells in my family tree meant that I did know that the spelling (in the days when clerks simply wrote down what they heard) could be Tredwell or Treadwell. If Mr C J Wythes simply heard the name spoken, he would not have known whether to write Tredwell or Treadwell.

Mr CJ Wythes states that “Mr Treadwell' farmed an area known as Whitehall Farm and Page Heath”.

Googling a few sources, I found the following references to Tredwells in Bromley, specifically in the Whitehall Farm and Southlands Road area.

Bromley Historic Collections: Land in Southlands Road, Bromley [Part of the Tredwell Estate]: Sales Particulars 1905-1925

And the friends of Whitehall Recreation ground have the following history on their website.

“Whitehall Rec is a 17.25-hectare green space and as we know it would not exist today had it not been for the vision and foresight of the Aldermen and Councillors of Bromley, who were witness to the massive wave of development spreading out from Bromley town centre ... The Bromley Urban District Council came into being in 1894, and one of its first acts was to try and secure a recreation ground for the inhabitants of Bromley Common and Bickley ... three fields totalling 14 acres became available and were purchased by the Council for £6,500.

These belonged to the farm situated where Tredwell Close is now, called Whitehall Farm, from which the Rec takes its name. Over the winter of 1904-5 these fields were levelled, and drainage installed, using unemployed men as labour, trees were planted along the paths, there were toilets and the whole park was enclosed with two main entrances, at Cowper/Walpole Road and at Southlands Road. The farm itself carried on, presumably connected to the fruit orchards to the east, former residents in Cowper Road remember the farm having pigs and buying bacon from there”. <http://friendsofwhitehallrec.weebly.com/history.html>

So, there is a connection from the Mr Treadwell/Tredwell who farmed Whitehall Farm, to the farm becoming Whitehall Recreation Ground and to the road later built through the Rec being named Tredwell Close.

Whether or not “Mr Treadwell” of Bromley died en route to India we do not know, but it seems he is remembered in a local road name. I do love it when roads are given relevant historical names. **Stella Eames**

Who were the Hodges of Beckenham?

Has anyone ever written about the Hodge family of Beckenham for *Bromleag*? Maria Hodge, widow of Major Hodge of the 7th Hussars, and two daughters, are interred in the graveyard of St George's church. **David at: davidmolony@btinternet.com**

Major Hodge has not featured in *Bromleag* but hopefully one of our Beckenham historians has knowledge of the Hussars' family that they can pass on to David — **Editor**

Charles Darwin, Justice of the Peace

A fascinating new resource concerning both the non-scientific life of Charles Darwin and the work of our local magistrates in the 19th century has been made available on the Darwin Online website.

Science historian Dr van Wyhe explains: “Obviously Darwin has long been one of the most intensively studied men of science in history. One might easily assume that there were no significant aspects of his life that had not already been revealed. And yet there is a fascinating side to Darwin’s public life that has remained almost completely unknown.

“From July 1857 until he died in April 1882, Darwin was a Justice of the Peace. Although the bare fact that he was one has been known and mentioned in the literature on Darwin from the very beginning, so far only brief mentions have ever appeared. The reason for this brevity is that the official case records are lost.

“But newspaper reports have been found that enable us to reconstruct the full story of Darwin as a Justice of the Peace. This lost record contains many surprises and not a few amusing episodes with which the great naturalist was involved in his local community.

“For example, the very day that *Origin of Species* was published on 24 November 1859, a crime and “riot” occurred in his own sleepy village of Downe that he would later pass judgment on from the bench.

“In addition, new research reveals that many of the details about what a Justice of the Peace (or magistrate) actually did and even what oath they swore, were mistaken in the existing literature on Darwin. Focusing on his neighbours, a fascinating private diary reaction to reading *Origin of Species* is published here for the first time. This book reveals a whole new chapter of Darwin’s life.”

The work is available as a free pdf file from <http://darwin-online.org.uk>. Click on What’s New and scroll down to 2021, 07.03. There is a wealth of transcribed material around the scientific life of Darwin on this site and complete transcription of Emma Darwin’s diaries which, like the magistrates material, are potentially a great local history resource.

John van Wyhe is a historian of science, Director of *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online* (<http://darwin-online.org.uk>) at the University of Singapore and University Professorial Fellow, Charles Darwin University, Australia.

Christine Chua is an Associate Editor (honorary) on *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online*, National University of Singapore

Linda Baldwin

Peggy Spencer archive goes online

Ballroom dancing legend Peggy Spencer, whose Royston Ballroom in Penge was the mecca for ballroom dancing enthusiasts back in the 1950/60s, left a considerable archive of material which has now been curated by the Bishopsgate Institute.

Penge had an important place in Peggy's heart, with her Penge Latin Formation Team. Her dancers were invited to perform twice at Buckingham Palace and Peggy choreographed a dance in the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*.

The archive was given to Bishopsgate by Peggy's daughter Helena and consists of 34 boxes of material and several larger items. You can view dozens of pictures and videos at <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk>

Bishopsgate Institute Special Collections and Archives document the experiences of everyday people, and the extraordinary individuals and organisations who have strived for social, political, and cultural change. **Mike Marriott**

Bromley's mysterious Red Cross box

I recently bought a large wooden box — the size of a trunk — from a charity shop in Tenterden. It's painted blue and has the following words painted on it in black: "British Red Cross Bromley Division Major disaster box", and has a Red Cross on the top.

It is a bit battered, as you'd expect, but it is wonderful. I was drawn to it as I am interested in the Red Cross during the wars and I used to work at Farnborough Hospital in the early 1990s, so came under Bromley Health Authority.

I wondered if anyone had any knowledge of this sort of box, where it might have been kept—a church hall springs to mind—or any information of the Red Cross in Bromley during

WWII. If anyone has any information, I'd be delighted to hear from you! **Louise**
Contact Louise at: theknitnurse@yahoo.co.uk



Drive-in dining comes — and goes — on Farnborough Way

The opening of the Ox-in-Flames in 1960

Max Batten



When the Farnborough by-pass was opened in 1927 it was probably some relief to local villagers but deprived the pubs and tearooms of passing trade. On Thursday 16 September 1960, a new threat to the three public houses in the village appeared on the bypass in the form of an American Drive-In restaurant called the Ox-in-Flames.

Why it was located there is something of a mystery, certainly not because it was midway between London and the English Channel as the *Chicago Tribune* of 25 September 1960 believed.

Older residents (like me) will vaguely remember this happening but in fact, locally, at least it seemed to have little impact. Nationally and internationally, however, things were different because the backer of this alien concept was an American businessman from Duluth, Minnesota, called Marshall William Reinig.

The Society was recently given some pictures of the Ox-in-Flames, *including the one below* (see the Mary Moore collection on our website), and this spurred curiosity to find out more. And the start is definitely with the interesting personality of Mr Reinig.

He was born on 28 August 1907 in Lorimor, Iowa, just south of Des Moines, of an American mother and German-born father, but moved to Chicago in the 1930s where he became involved with publishing a trade magazine about distilled spirits (Prohibition ended in 1933). He then teamed up with a colleague to set up their own publishing company. This was not successful, so he concentrated on selling advertising, which proved much more lucrative.

He also met and married Anita, a





journalist and writer, and in 1942 established a new organisation, The Davidson Publishing Company.

However, his busy life and punishing schedule affected his health and he was diagnosed with pernicious anaemia. In 1947 he sold his share of the business to his partner Ted Shondell and the family, now including a daughter, Janet, moved to the small town of Ely, Minnesota, where he decided to take up mink farming, a booming business at the time.

Within a couple of years Mr Shondell suddenly died and to help his widow, Marshall, *pictured left*, bought back the publishing company. But mink farming in Chicago or publishing in the wilds of

middle America were not practicable so as a compromise in 1949 the family relocated 80 miles south to Duluth on the shores of Lake Superior. He later changed the company name to Ojibway Press after a local native American tribe. Following a long and distinguished career he moved to Georgia and died at a town called Evans, on the outskirts of Augusta on 29 March 2003 aged 95, although sadly his latter years were blighted by Alzheimer's.

Extensive records remain of his business, political and philanthropic activities in the US, including publishing and printing, running two mink farms, as a director of a bank, and dealing in property and mobile homes. He was also a keen sailor. He liked making money, but he also liked being busy.

The reason why he suddenly became involved in a novel catering concept for the UK of drive-in dining may lie among the magazine titles his company acquired. The one with the largest circulation was *Diner, Drive-In and Restaurant*. His publishing company also produced a *Management Guide to Drive-In Restaurants* in 1966.

At the time, Britain was finally shedding wartime woes, in the 1959 election we were told we had "never had it so good" and some American entrepreneurs, for example Conrad Hilton, were seeing opportunities for new business, particularly in the service market.

Marshall "wanted in on the action" and backed by three other mink farmers he contacted Florida State University, which had one of the leading restaurant and hotel management schools as well as a professor who regularly contributed to the "Drive-In" magazine, for advice.

Marshall obtained a visa for the UK in 1959. It is not clear when he arrived in the UK

Feature

but he returned to America on the “Queen Elizabeth”, getting back to New York on 11 August. Subsequently, he made other short visits but relied on “our professor” from Florida, who was now resident in England, for day-to-day advice.

In May 1960, Orpington Urban District Council was advised that provisional approval had been given to an application to Kent County Council for the erection of a new restaurant next to the existing Esso garage on Farnborough Way to be called the Ox-in-Flames, subject to agreement on landscaping details. The application was submitted by a Mr WJ Shaw, managing director of the company. The building was designed by Mountford Pigott — who also designed the rebuilt Congregational Church in Bromley in 1945 (subsequently replaced and finally demolished to make way for The Glades shopping centre).

On 5 October, some two weeks after opening, it was recorded that Orpington UDC was unhappy with the way the work had been carried out (causing an interference with the highway) and would notify KCC of the contravention of the planning

consent.

It has been recorded that Marshall Reinig flew to London (on TWA flight 703) on 26 July 1960 and returned on 23 September after the opening, but it appears he made more than one trip that summer.

The restaurant first opened for business on 10 September but the official opening was not until the 15th when, according to the following day’s *Bromley and Kentish Times*, he had flown over the previous night.

The official opening



Drive-in dining on the chilly Farnborough bypass was not a great success. This is a publicity photo and, given the number plate, the car was possibly the PR guy's own.

Feature

was attended by TV and radio cook Phillip Harben (1906-70) and the (6th) Marquis and Marchioness of Bath. They enjoyed “succulent broasted (*sic*) chicken cooked in 6½ minutes by magic ray”, described as an infra-red ray, no doubt similar to a modern microwave. It was reportedly “absolutely delicious and cooked just right”.

According to an advertisement in the *Orpington Guide*, the opening had been covered by the national press and garnered praise from the *Sunday Pictorial*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, among others. The restaurant was also “open every day and night” at a time when seven day-a-week opening was very unusual.

The reason for the presence of the Marquis of Bath is unclear but he had gone to school in Sevenoaks so perhaps this was the local connection. It was also reported that during opening week 10,000 householders in Bromley and Orpington were being invited to the drive-in for a free beefburger and unspecified “free gifts for women”.

No dish would take longer than six-and-a-half minutes to prepare and, since it was self-service, only needed two full-time staff. It was hoped this would be a model for 40 establishments throughout the country and a second site was already under consideration.

In addition to the honoured guests, two girls (including a former Miss Great Britain) in check shirts and short skirts and wearing a cross between an usherette’s cap and forage hat were on hand to serve guests who preferred to remain in their cars rather than visit the restaurant. This concept was the main selling point for the restaurant but as the *Chicago Tribune* noted on 25 September 1960, it had not been without problems and by the following day the chilled car-hops had disappeared. Taking a rubberised tray outside to sit in your car when in fact there were 78 seats in the restaurant also suggests that the eat-in-the-car concept was always seen as optional.

Despite Mr Shaw telling the *Kentish Times* on 23 September 1960 that the restaurant had been sited on the bypass because it was in easy reach of 500,000 residents, and his expectation was that they would get many customers as a result, in addition to motorists, the expected drive-in diners did not materialise. It is not really clear why people would make their way to this location, apart from any curious inhabitants of Farnborough Village.

Marshall records that it “finally became apparent that virtually everything about the place was wrong. The building was poorly arranged, the publicity and promotion were badly handled and help was difficult”. It may be that “the professor’s” academic theory had not matched actual business life.

With rising operating losses, it was decided to close the restaurant after only a few months. Being autumn and winter probably did not help and it’s worth noting that in 1960 there were fewer than five million private cars. Today there are more than 40 million. So maybe Marshall was just ahead of his time. Some time after its closure, the restaurant was sold to Esso, which supplied the adjacent garage, but according to

Marshall “four greedy mink farmers ... took a helluva loss”.

Beefburgers go back to 1919 in America but the first British Wimpy was not opened until 1954, under licence, in the Lyons Corner house in Coventry Street, London. Little Chef, too, had opened its first roadside restaurant in 1958 (in Reading) and the Ox-in-Flames later became a Little Chef although it retained its original name until the late 1960s. The first motorway service station opened in November 1959 in Newport Pagnell, so we have to treat the “first drive-in restaurant” title with some caution. For some reason, the “Ox-in-Flames” name lives on as a repair garage in Knockholt.

But perhaps the biggest problem for the man from Minnesota, as Reinig was sometimes referred to in the newspapers, was the *name* of the restaurant. Such was the concern over this that it achieved wide publicity in North America, going as far west as a report in the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper on 20 September 1960.

One can see the connection between beefburgers and the Ox-in-Flames, but I doubt if it would have done any better under Reinig’s preferred name of, “The Flaming Ox”.

My thanks to Simon Finch at Bromley Library, Stacy LaVres at Duluth Public Library, Aimee Brown at the University of Minnesota Duluth, and Tony Hayward for their help in collating this information. I must particularly thank Janet Kruger of Spokane, Washington, for providing much extra detail about her father and access to his notes

CofE digitally mapping graveyards

A seven-year project to map the graves in 19,000 churchyards in England is being undertaken by the Church of England. They will be available on a website that will eventually list every grave and memorial in every churchyard in the country.

The new free web-based record system is due to launch next spring, with the option to subscribe to additional services.

Funding for the programme has come from Historic England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Caring for God’s Acre, a charity which helps care for burial grounds, and genealogy research websites.

As well as capturing details of burials, the online interactive map will detail biodiversity in churchyards, including ancient trees and plant life, and green technology such as solar panels.

The creation of South Hill Park

Tudor Davies

The estate that came to be known as South Hill Park stretched westward from Bromley South Station and Masons Hill. It was purchased by John White between 1844 and his death in 1866, after which his son Francis spent 30 years dismantling what his father had so recently acquired.

Passengers taking in the view from the concourse of Bromley South Station immediately after its opening in 1858 would have looked on a landscape of traditional Kent countryside. The High Street ended some 200 yards away near the Library. Bromley Lodge, home to Colonel George Tweedy, stood in its acres of grounds overlooking the Station and gravel pit in which it had been built.

To the south stood a handful of cottages on Masons Hill with the imposing house of Ravensfell dominating the skyline. *Strong's Directory* of 1859 described Masons Hill in these words: "A small hamlet with an ancient building on the brow of the hill occupied by Rev J. Nesbit, now E Soames Esquire. Several other pleasant residences lately built [on Bromley Common]. The 'Tigers Head' rebuilt a few years ago".

There was no road westward to Pickhurst, West Wickham or Langley Park, simply two or three footpaths through the fields of New Farm which was accessed by a cart track from the bottom of Masons Hill that crossed the river Ravensbourne to end in the farmyard.

The Tithe Commissioners Survey, 1841, recorded the owners and occupiers of all land in Bromley including the 196-acre New Farm that was owned by Edward Cranfield, a sealing wax maker of West Smithfield, London, and leased to farmer William Skinner.

Three years later, on 23 January 1844, the *Sun* newspaper [London] printed a short article under the headline "Melancholy Suicide" which described events surrounding the death of Edward Cranfield the previous month. "The proprietor of the farm and estate destroyed himself by discharging a horse pistol into his mouth and literally blowing his head to atoms ... He had been to London on Wednesday and returned with a newly acquired horse pistol which he told his wife was for the purpose of giving to a boy to scare away the crows ... Mr Flett, a surgeon of Bromley, confirmed the gun had been loaded with powder to the muzzle ... The jury recorded the deceased destroyed himself while in a state of temporary derangement."

In such sad circumstances the farm was put up for sale and purchased by John White of St. Andrews Place, Regents Park, with a lease of 3,000 years. With his brother Charles he owned two companies, a spirits and sherry merchant at

9 Cullum Street, London, and wine and brandy merchants at number 18 in the same street.

Between 1844 and his death in 1865, whenever suitable land was available he added to his farm in Bromley, eventually accumulating three plots on Masons Hill; in 1857 South Hill House with 17 acres of fields reaching down to the Ravensbourne, in 1859 a neighbouring four acres and, just months before his death, 2.5 acres known as Bell Meadow, described by the agent as “sometimes under water”.

His estate then extended just under a mile from Cromwell Road on Masons Hill to Tootswood on Hayes Lane, Beckenham. John White’s death coincided with new owners of estates either side of lower High Street.

At the same time, land to the north of Bromley Station was also under new



Bromley South Station in the countryside around 1861 The hamlet of Masons Hill overlooks the Ravensbourne valley where a cart track connected Masons Hill to the yard at New Farm

Feature

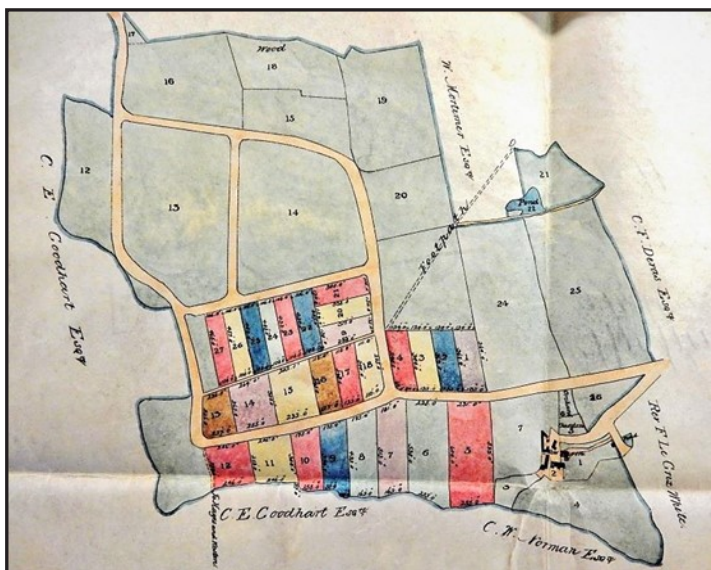
ownership. In 1855 Charles Devas purchased Bromley Lodge and in 1867, a few years after the death of George Tweedy, Bromley House, which encompassed Simpsons Place on the west of the High Street, was sold to the British Land Company.

The stage was set for the rapid development of all land surrounding the Station. The Land Company retained Simpsons Place, on which they built Ravensbourne, Ringers and Ethelbert Roads, but sold 10 acres south of the railway line to Charles Devas. He began building Newbury and Aylesbury Roads after purchasing a building plot from New Farm Estate which gave him the required road link to Bromley South. Today this is a busy road junction opposite St Marks Church.

At the same time, on the triangle of land between lower High Street and Westmoreland Road, the British Land Company built Simpsons Road and Chatsworth Road.

Within months of John White's death, portions of his Estate were identified for

development. So when John Knight, yeoman of Nottingham, bought a 21-year lease on New Farm, the acreage had already been reduced to 162.



Plots for sale at the first auction of 1876. The newly-built Westmoreland Road was the main artery serving the Estate. Other roads made use of farm tracks that once served the fields. Westmoreland Road did not continue to Hayes Lane but turned right along what we know as South Hill Road. The original farm is shown bottom right, the mill pond (in blue, top right) is now the sports field for St Mark's Primary School [Aylesbury Road School]

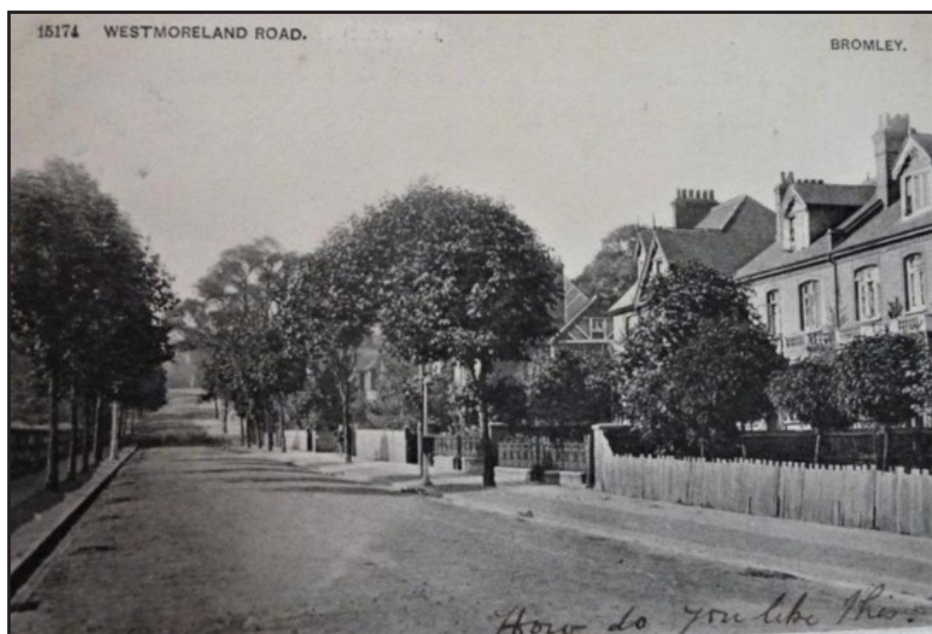
South Hill Park emerges

John White's eldest son — who, proud of his Norman-French ancestry, styled himself Francis le Grix White — had no connection with, and no interest in, his Estate in Bromley. He entered Worcester

College Oxford with the original intention of studying law but after gaining a BA and then pupillage he changed his mind and took an MA degree in Divinity.

His first post after qualifying was as chaplain to the Marquis of Drogheda [1850], then as curate of churches at Bettshanger and St Clements, Sandwich [1851-1857] and finally as vicar of Croxton Church, Staffordshire. However, in the census of 1871 he was described as "Clerk in Holy Orders without care of souls" and living at Leaming House, Ullswater, Cumberland, with his wife and four servants.

Like many wealthy gentlemen of the day, his inherited wealth allowed him to focus on personal interests, in his case geology. In 1876, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh for his work in this field. Living at the other end of England and fully absorbed in his hobbies with no interest in his Estate other than its money value, he appointed land agents Baxter, Payne and Lepper of Bromley to manage the



Worthy of a postcard: view of Westmoreland Road before the First World War and little changed in 2021. Until 1910 by looking over the paling fence on the left you could watch members of Bromley Lawn Tennis Club at their leisure pursuit. The club moved from Holwood Road in 1887, when their ground was sold for housebuilding, only to be evicted a second time for the same reason in 1910 when they occupied their current site on Sandford Road. There were 100 members, eight courts and annual subscriptions of £1.25 with balls provided free.

Feature

sale, which was conducted in a series of auctions between 1875 and 1901.

His home address might supply a clue to the puzzling road names to be found in this part of Bromley — Westmoreland, Cumberland, Durham and Whitehaven. It was the agents who decided New Farm was too commercial a name and applied the more salubrious name South Hill Park to the entire estate.

Initially plots were leased, but occasionally, when the agents thought they might attract sufficiently wealthy buyers, a few were sold as freehold properties. James Ponsford, a nurseryman, of 72 Loughborough Park, Camberwell, was quick to see an opportunity for expanding his business at a location where wealthy residents would wish to landscape and plant their new gardens to reflect their status. In 1874 he took a 21-year lease on four acres to create a new nursery next to Aylesbury Road.

In the years his business flourished he lived at Streamlet House on the corner of St Marks Church and Sandford Road. As plot sales progressed and the value of James Ponsford's land increased, the agents negotiated a revised lease that halved the area of his nursery. This action was repeated in 1886, when his lease was reduced to one acre but retained access to Westmoreland Road.

Immediately following agreement of this last lease, Queen Anne Avenue was built across what had been the middle of his nursery. At the far end of Aylesbury Road a little over an acre owned by South Hill Park estate was sold to Bromley Board of Education in 1889 as the site for Aylesbury Road Elementary School, now St Mark's C of E school, the rear boundary of which backs on to Queen Anne Avenue.

The field at the bottom of Masons Hill was owned by John Wells of Bickley Park and leased to Godfrey Stidolph, where he ran a nursery. But in 1871 part was taken to build Masons Hill School while the remaining portion became open land down to Sandford Road and Bell Meadow. Part of the meadow fronting Westmoreland Road was bought in 1892 by the Parish Church Trustees under the chairmanship of the Vicar of Bromley, the Rev. Arthur Gresley Hellicar, for the site of St Marks Church.

Beyond the meadow, the better drained farm fields rose gently up the hill, presenting idyllic Kent countryside so desirable to wealthy house buyers. Road and house building proceeded for over 50 years, with New Farm Avenue — built on the site of the farm orchard — not being completed until the 1920s.

Many new roads were soon lined with grand detached houses, many with servants' quarters, bathrooms, stabling, "in-out" drives and large gardens of an acre or more. One or two of the later houses possessed electric lighting. On Westmoreland Road, only one grand house now remains to illustrate the imposing properties that adorned the highway. The home of Thomas Charles Dewey, Charter Mayor of Bromley and Chairman of the Prudential Insurance Company [1910] bought his two acre plot in 1886.

Development moves south and west

Two landowners with large estates abutting South Hill Park recognised the potential development value of their land if they could gain easy access to Bromley South Station. Charles Emmanuel Goodhart of Langley Park was the first to act. At the far end of Westmoreland Road where it is joined by South Hill, a field belonging to New Farm separated Charles Goodhart's land from the new road.

He purchased a 45-foot strip across the field with permission to build a road giving direct access to Bromley South. Today this strip is where your car joins the queue waiting at the traffic lights to enter Hayes Lane or Barnfield Wood Road.

The Norman family's Estate on Bromley Common extended across Hayes Lane towards Bromley South when in 1884 Charles Lloyd Norman purchased five acres of Oak Tree Meadow, bringing his land closer to the Station. A few months later he purchased a 40-foot strip of land across Bell Meadow with permission to construct a road. This marked the birth of Hayes Road, Cameron Road and Beadon Road.

The original Simpsons and Chatsworth Roads were demolished in the 1970s to make way for Westmoreland Shopping Precinct and high rise offices, only to be demolished 40 years later and replaced with the recently-built St Mark's Square.

From the 1950s many of the larger houses on the Estate were demolished or refurbished.

Next month Tudor will be looking in more detail at the properties that made up the new urban landscapes and some of the residents who chose to make their home there.

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**A not-so-hot development in
1960s Farnborough— Page 25**

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