



# Bromleag

*The journal of the Bromley Borough Local History Society*

Issue 59 September 2021



**The marvellous Home Guard map**

**New meeting venue in Bickley**

**Mutiny at Biggin Hill and Shortlands**

**A personal glimpse of a C17<sup>th</sup> family**

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*The journal of the Bromley Borough  
Local History Society*



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**Front cover:** Max Gill Home Guard map © Bromley Historic Collections  
Accession Number LDBMP : 94.520. The map can be seen in much greater  
detail on our website, where there is also a key to all the picture symbols

**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](http://www.bblhs.org.uk)

**Next journal deadline — 15 October 2021**

# Meetings resume at a new venue

**David Hanrahan, Chairman**

**Who would have imagined over 12 months ago we would only just be beginning to ease out of lockdown? I had hoped that we would by now be attending our monthly meetings in the hall, enjoying the company of other members in a social environment. Not to be yet.**

I have spent some time looking at alternative venues for our future meetings that offer more suitable accommodation than that of Trinity Church.

I think I have now found such a place at St George's Church, Bickley. The hall is much more spacious and has better kitchen and toilet facilities. Transport links are excellent with buses and trains nearby, and easy car parking on site and in the road. Accessibility is good for the less mobile, being stepless with large doorways. There is plenty of space in the hall and my idea is to set out tables with, say, six seats each, which will mean we can continue to be socially distanced and have somewhere for cups of tea or coffee. This should make it a more comfortable place to catch up with friends etc.

The committee has decided to defer the first live meeting until 5 October, to give us more time to ease out of lockdown. We shall send out more information nearer the time.

In addition to the live meetings we hope to be able to record the talks and send an email link to members after the actual meeting.

I very much look forward to welcoming you back to a live meeting in October.



*The hall is at 25 St George's Road, Bromley BR1 2AU, on the corner of Bickley Park Road*

*The 162 and 269 buses stop outside the church and Bickley Station is a short walk away.*

# Who's Who on the BBLHS committee

**www.bblhs.org.uk**

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# BBLHS ZOOM MEETING

## **Tuesday 7 September 7.30 Members' Evening**

We hope this will be our last Zoom meeting. Three members will be telling us about their latest research on footpaths and how they change; Beckenham history; and Bromley postal history. It's an interesting mix with something for everyone.

An invitation to the talk will be sent out by email well in advance, with a reminder a few days before the meeting. Unfortunately, several of our members do not have computers or are unable to use Zoom so we hope to get back to normal meetings as soon as possible.

## MEETINGS AT St GEORGE'S HALL, BICKLEY

### **Meetings will be at 7.45 pm on the first Tuesday of the month**

Full details of the meeting hall along with information on parking and transport will be emailed or sent by post to all members in September. We will also include details of any Covid protocols that either the church or BBLHS have put in place.

### **Tuesday 5 October 7.45**

#### **Wandering through the Crays — Jerry Dowlen**

A social history of St Mary Cray focusing on its local economy and dramatic "boom and bust" cycles from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day

### **Tuesday 2 November 7.45**

#### **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.

## 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.

# St George's and the beginning of suburban Bickley

Christine Hellicar

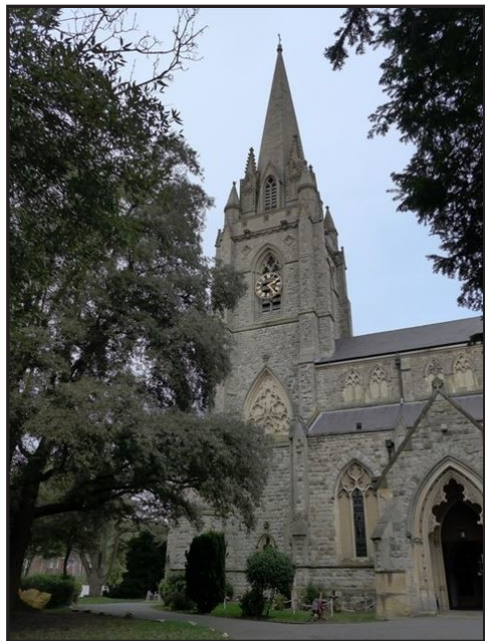
**S**t George's Church in Bickley Park Road, with its prominent 175-foot spire, is a landmark that can be seen for miles around.

**It was built by George Wythes who bought Bickley Hall and other land holdings in 1861. By then, Bickley Hall was already a century old and the land of Bickley had been cultivated and some tracks were become roads, but George Wythes was the man who turned Bickley into a residential area.**

Horsburgh tell us: "[Wythes] while retaining the mansion as a residence for himself, immediately proceeded to develop his purchase to the utmost economic advantage. It was his principle to have upon his property only large and commodious houses enclosed in fairly extensive grounds, from two to five acres." He also set up a cricket club for the new wealthy residents, built new roads and a water tower that acted as a gateway to the area.

St George's, completed in 1864, is Victorian gothic and cost, with the parsonage, between £12,000 and £20,000 — the sum changes in various accounts. At that time Bickley was only 718 acres and the population 928 and so not large enough to be a parish of its own. An agreement was made with Bromley Parish and the parish of St Luke's, Bromley Common, for a large part of Widmore to be included in the new parish of Bickley and Widmore.

It was, Horsburgh tells us, "very high church". George's two daughters later became Catholics. St George's today remains substantially the same building but with the addition of a hall. The original spire was shortened in 1906 and the building suffered frequently in the Second World War, losing much of its glass and the roof and in 1989 a fire destroyed much of the interior. But it has always been restored to its original design.





## Who was George Wythes?

Horsburgh describes him as a “wealthy contractor” and elsewhere he is called a “public works contractor”. He left an estate valued at £1.5 million (more than £1 billion in today’s money). He was a very successful property developer but was renowned as a railway engineer —“at one time in the foremost rank of railway engineers”, according to the Institute of Civil Engineers, of which he was an associate. He was highly regarded both for his skills and his personal qualities.

An obituary in *Railway News* described him as a man of sound judgment and naturally retiring habits who constantly supervised every detail of his business.

The Institute of Civil Engineers obituary also speaks highly of the man: “He certainly was one of the most successful railway contractors of his day ... such a man does not rise to the summit of his profession by accident ... good sense and good nature led him to treat everyone connected with him in business with that delicate and considerate courtesy which never yet failed to create mutual confidence and respect ... no officials ever were allowed to be obstructive in the path of those who wanted a personal interview, regardless of the importance or position of the person seeking it, from the Plate-layer of the line of rails to the Chairman of the Company ... his office was open to all corners.”

George Wythes was born in 1811 into a Worcestershire landowning and farming family. He left home at an early age to work on the construction of canals, but soon moved into the new transport world, railways, becoming a contractor on railway projects across the southern counties “too numerous to specify”, according to *Railway News*. He was employed in the earlier portion of his career on one of the main lines in France, when most English contractors were not keen to work on European projects.

By the age of 32: “He had amassed a considerable sum of money ... he was pointed at as the rising contractor of the day ... he rose rapidly in influence and in wealth in the railway world, until he became associated with Messrs. Brassey, Jackson, and others, in carrying out very important and extensive contracts in Europe and in the East”.<sup>1</sup> His first partnership was with another engineer, Joseph Jackson.

According to *Grace’s Guide*, in 1850 Jackson carried out a preliminary survey for the Great Indian Peninsular Railway and ascertained local resources and manpower, which “enabled him to send valuable knowledge to George Wythes in England so he could make a successful tender for part of the work”. George, it would seem, did not go to India, but Joseph Jackson was again there in 1860 when he came down with dysentery and died in Bombay.

In partnership with Jackson and others, George was heavily involved in the construction of Dutch, Canadian, American, South American and South Africa

railways “and [he was] one of the largest contractors for India railways”.<sup>2</sup>

His business interests were not confined to railways. He invested at Crystal Palace, buying surplus land not required for the buildings and park. This may have been for railway lines or for housing development. At the time of his death he owned estates in Surrey, Suffolk, Kent and Essex.

He also had a large interest in blast furnaces in the north of England and mining operations in Greece. “There are few countries in Europe with which his name and capital were not associated, and he had property scattered over almost every quarter of the globe.”<sup>1</sup>

It would be interesting to know how George Wythes was drawn to Bickley. According to Mr C J Wythes of Canon Road, Bromley, (relationship unknown) George Wythes knew a Mr Treadwell who lived in Southlands Road, and farmed an area known as Whitehall and Page Heath: “He was invited by Mr Treadwell to go out to India with him. Mr Treadwell died on the journey out and Mr Wythes laid the railway.”<sup>3</sup> This, however, is a misremembered or apocryphal tale.

I have been unable to find a likely Treadwell family in Bromley in the census but George was connected to a Solomon Treadwell – who was also a Worcestershire railwayman like George – who died in India in 1859 and part of his railway contract was taken over by Wythes and Jackson.

C J Wythes is also quoted as saying that when he bought Bickley Hall George Wythes purchased parts of Widmore and “bought the Treadwell estate and a considerable part of Southborough extending to a district known as Town Court”.<sup>3</sup> Bromley Archives hold The Wythes Estate Papers which refer to the acquisition of land in Sydenham, Penge and Bickley Park. The conveyance of the Bickley estate from its former owner William Dent to George Wythes lists land in Bromley, including Blackbrook Common (in the area of Southborough) and Chislehurst, taking in parts of Bullers Wood. Detailed research of the papers might reveal more transactions.

George married Frances Wagstaff in 1836 and they moved around the country a great deal with his work, mainly in Southern England, before settling at Bickley Hall.

He had one surviving son, George, born in 1839, for whom he bought a home, Copped Hall near Epping, at the same time as he purchased Bickley Hall. Young George died in 1875. “This was a terrible blow to his father. Life lost its zest, and his home and wealth their charm.” His wife died four years later and this “accelerated the ravages of the disease which now began to make serious inroads upon his bodily strength”.<sup>1</sup>

After his son’s death, George brought his two grandsons to live with him in Bickley. The eldest also died young and the younger, Ernest James, inherited both Bickley Hall and Copped Hall. Ernest became High Sheriff of Essex in 1901, but although living in



Essex he maintained an interest in the Bickley Hall estate and gifted a monument to the Wythes family in St George's Church.

The Wythes family left Bickley about 1908 and leased the hall to a private school. Piecemeal development took place on the periphery of the park until the mid-1960s when the rest of the land was sold for development. As a century before, large expensive houses predominated but on rather smaller plots. Many of the original Bickley houses proved too large for 20<sup>th</sup> century living and were short-lived, replaced by smaller but still upmarket modern developments.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Civil Engineers obituary

<sup>2</sup> *Railway News* obituary

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Bromleag* 1979 as a "document in Bromley Local History Department"

### Sources

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[www.ideal-homes.org.uk/bromley/assets/galleries/bickley/bickley-hall.html](http://www.ideal-homes.org.uk/bromley/assets/galleries/bickley/bickley-hall.html)

[www.stgeorgebickley.co.uk/about-us/](http://www.stgeorgebickley.co.uk/about-us/)

[www.gracesguide.co.uk/George\\_Wythes](http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/George_Wythes)

*History of Bromley* by ELS Horsburgh; *Bromleag* 1979

## Janet Simpson's sketches of Bromley

**We were contacted by Sue Jolly, who lives in Somerset. She is the granddaughter of George Kirby whose watch and clock shop opened by his father (another George) in 1880 was in East Street, Bromley, until 1957.**

However, the reason she was writing was because her great aunt, Mildred Kirby, had been a friend of the local artist Janet Simpson, whose series of drawings can be seen on the BBLHS website.

Because of their friendship, Janet Simpson had given to Sue's great aunt copies of her drawings, including some we had not previously seen.

These consist of a view of the High Street just north of the Royal Bell, the font in the Parish Church (sent as a Christmas card) and another view of the junction of the High Street with Beckenham Lane. By strange coincidence, this picture includes a glimpse of Park House, which was featured in the June edition of *Bromleag*. A fourth picture of angels surrounding a crib, perhaps another Christmas card, has been added out of interest in the artist's work.

Sue has given us copies of the "new" pictures which can be seen, along with the rest of Janet's lovely drawings at [www.bblhs.org.uk](http://www.bblhs.org.uk) (Galleries, Picture Collections).

## Preserving the past for the future

**Just before the last lockdown in 2020, a group of BBLHS members indicated their willingness to help digitise the thousands of books, papers, photos and microfilms that lurk in the Bromley Library archives.** This was put on hold, but from the middle of May 2021, after a preliminary meeting with Senior Archivist Rob Faulkner and Librarian Simon Finch, a plan of action was agreed and work finally started.

Some years ago, the Society paid two history students to scan the annotated copy of Horsburgh's *Bromley* (now available free on our website) and the complete set of the *Bromley Record* (1858-1913), which can be purchased on eBay or direct from the Society. This was made possible by the kind bequest from Jean Tresize but had to be done at Bexley library, which had the necessary equipment. Since then, Bromley Library has purchased a new book scanner and other scanning devices which give more opportunity to digitise their archives, to both preserve the information and make it easier to access.

As there was plenty of material that could be scanned in-house, it was not felt necessary to use more of the bequest at this time and, instead, Society volunteers were invited to help with the work. Several members responded and most, we are pleased to say, are now carrying out a variety of scanning tasks each week. Recent activities include Jean Wilson scanning photographs, Linda Baldwin wartime bombing records, Tudor Davies the *Chislehurst and District Times*, Paul Rason war memorials and Max Batten the *Bromley and West Kent Telegraph*.

Access at present is limited so has to be carefully scheduled, but we hope the situation will gradually improve. As this happens, more volunteers would be very welcome – there are a range of tasks covering material from all over the Borough so you can choose what, when and how you assist.

This is really worthwhile work, preserving the past for the future, and if anyone else would like to put their name on the list, please let Max Batten know (admin@bblhs.org.uk) and he will be happy to discuss the options further. **MB**

## X-rays — new ways of seeing

Our member Dr Adrian Thomas, who has given some excellent talks on Bromley hospitals and medical pioneers to the Society, was a guest on the BBC World Service programme *X-rays: New Ways of Seeing* in which Bridget Kendall and guests examined what led to the discovery of “a new kind of rays” in 1895, and how they have permeated medicine, physics and popular culture in the years since.

*The programme is available to listen to or download at*  
**<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct1rl6>**

# Home Guard history wrapped up in a cartoon

The location of Home Guard sites during World War II has been of increasing interest in recent years. In 2016 Orpington and District Archaeological Society (ODAS) were researching the WWII rifle range and trench-works at Scadbury in Chislehurst and discovered in the Bromley Historic Collections picture archive the beautiful cartoon map by Max Gill pictured on our front cover.

The map is fascinating to examine in detail and is of great benefit to anyone wishing to find out more about the Home Guard in Bromley. It can be seen in greater detail on the articles page of our website along with a key to the meaning of the icons.

Below are extracts from **Bryan Matthews's** original article, courtesy of ODAS.

**T**he London "P" Sector colourful map measures about three feet square and shows the whole of the "P" Sector Home Guard facilities in cartoon form, including observation posts, stop line, ranges, several types of weapon, command posts etc and is dated 1944. [P sector included most of the present day borough of Bromley]



An enlarged section of the map showing Scadbury towards the upper right and much detail of the Home Guard weaponry – Northover Projector, Spigot Mortar, Machine Gun and Fougasse

© Bromley Historic Collections Accession Number LDBMP : 94.520.

## *Feature*

Even though the Home Guard was disbanded in December 1944, the detail and date were surprising. The threat of invasion had passed by then but we were still at war.

The map was a presentation piece dedicated to Colonel FW Chamberlain CBE who led P Sector between May 1940 and December 1944. The artist's name at the lower right corner, with the date, was MacDonald Gill. The map had been framed by Chapman & Bros of Chelsea.

### **Francis Chamberlain and the Glebe**

Francis Walter Chamberlain (1893 – 1970) was the son of a Croydon solicitor. He was admitted to the same profession in December 1913 but did not join his father's firm until 1919. In WWI he served with the Royal Garrison Artillery. Later in life he was awarded the CBE, became a JP, Deputy Lord Lieutenant Kent and, in 1949, High Sheriff of Kent.

In 1925 Col Chamberlain acquired the somewhat dilapidated rectory off Corkscrew Hill, West Wickham — renaming it Glebe House — along with several acres of surrounding land. Initially he made small alterations to the house, barns were retained as garages and poplars were planted to screen the view of nearby housing developments.

In 1965 he gave land off Glebe Way to the Beckenham & West Wickham Old People's Welfare Committee, which

soon built Glebe Court to house 24 residents. On his death and that of his wife, the remaining estate was sold to the Glebe Housing Association.

They further extended the purpose-built accommodation while the old house (Grade II listed and used as offices) was modified in 1977.

### **MacDonald Gill – Out of the Shadows**

Our research uncovered MacDonald Gill's accounts (Workbook) and we learnt that he worked on this piece for 72 hours during November and December 1944 and received payment of 15 guineas on 3 January 1945.

"Max" Gill (1884 – 1947) was a well-known and respected artist, cartographer and architect of his time. Born in Brighton to Tidman Gill, an ordained priest in the Church of England, and Muriel Bennett, some-time concert party singer, "Max" was the



King George VI inspects the Home Guard with Col Francis Chamberlain, left, on a visit to West Wickham in 1940 when 4,000 Home Guard paraded on the Cricket Ground. He watched training exercises and demonstrations .

second of six brothers. His career was to be much involved with his older brother, Eric, both showing early artistic tendencies. In Max's case he was drawing maps on demand as a schoolboy and when he left school in Chichester, where the family then resided, he became articled to a local architect.

Max moved to a London practice and continued his architectural studies at the Central School of Arts & Crafts where his interest in cartography and calligraphy grew and he won scholarships and prizes.

Eric Gill moved into the art of calligraphy (many of us use "Gill Sans" lettering or a derivative – have a look at your word processor's fonts), letter-cutting and sculpture, in which he was later to collaborate with Max.

By 1908 Max's work was respected and sufficient commissions enabled him to start his own architectural practice from his London, Temple, studios. The demand for promotional graphics work was growing in the immediate pre-WWI years when he had several commissions from the London Electric Railway Co (LER), for whom he designed the first underground railway map (which, before the system became so complex, could be geographically correct). The LER employed Max for several graphic London "cartoon" maps – "Wonderground" and "Theatreland" appearing on stations to amuse the waiting passengers.

During WW1 he was pre-occupied in experimental farming in the drive to increase food production and post-war he designed the lettering and regimental emblems for the Imperial War Graves Commission, which work continued through WW2 as well.

In the 'tween wars years, his poster work was in great demand by industry. Among these were such as Shell-Mex and Spillers. Fame had surely arrived when his "Highways of Empire" appeared in Charing Cross Rd on what was said to be the largest hoarding yet seen. It caused chaos as crowds gathered to wonder at it!

His maps of the Arctic and Antarctic held at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, are especially treasured. His work continued into WWII with commissions from such as Cunard, Ministry of Information posters and commemorations of the Atlantic Charter of 1942. "Tea revives the World" and "Great Circle" are notable pieces of this period.

Gill's amazingly skilful, artistic work encompassing a wide range of forms and media were much sought after in his time but faded into obscurity after his death. However, recently it has gained recognition by another generation thanks to the enthusiasm of Caroline Walker (related to Gill).

More information on Gill's life and work, with many illustrations of his wonderful maps, can be seen at [www.macdonaldgill.com](http://www.macdonaldgill.com)

## Defence and tragedy in WWII West Wickham

**The importance of the Home Guard in the Second World War became very clear in Peter Leigh's Zoom talk to the Society earlier this year. He has meticulously researched West Wickham in that period, looking at the impact on the lives of the people, the local defence response and the part played by the area in national defence strategy.**

West Wickham was a very new suburb of 20,000 people in 1939, with housing estates only very recently replacing the grand country houses. Local preparations for war were under way before September 1939: "West Wickham was quick off the mark and in 1938 had 38 Wardens, 12 Assistant Wardens and 27 First Aiders". An ARP post with a siren on its tower to warn of air raids opened in July 1939

Peter told us how all the local organisations pulled together, The Women's Institute helped in the canteen at the Fire Station and the Fire Service collated information on water sources. Local buildings were re-purposed, such as old cow sheds as sleeping quarters and an Auxiliary Fire Service sub-station in the Assembly Rooms.

Running through part of West Wickham were parts of London's anti-tank line; "gaps between houses were filled with six-foot cube concrete blocks and 18 feet wide and nine feet deep trenches were dug through the grounds of Glebe House. At the bottom of Corkscrew Hill there were concrete blocks with holes bored through them so that steel bars could be threaded through. A pill box was built in the front garden of 31 Corkscrew Hill". The tank traps in Glebe Way remained there until the late 1950s when the road was finally completed.

By 1943 anti-aircraft fire had been strengthened. There was a large battery at the junction of Baston Road and Croydon Road on Hayes Common and another on part of The Addington golf course at the top of Bridle Road. In September 1942, Wickham Court became the HQ for the 27<sup>th</sup> Anti – Aircraft Brigade.

In June 1940, as the Battle of Britain began, the war came near — "Biggin Hill took a pasting and dogfights over West Wickham were common". Peter has researched every incident that affected the people of West Wickham

On 31 August 1940, No. 85 The Avenue was the first house in West Wickham to receive a direct hit. A week later air raids began that were to continue for 57 nights,

Bombs in Station Road, Wickham Crescent, MacAndrews, Corkscrew Hill where three people died, Wickham Court Road and Stambourne Way. In Links Road a bomb destroyed four houses, killing three occupants at No.8 who had no shelter.

Woolworths and other shops in the High Street were badly damaged by a 500lb bomb. Bomb damage occurred most nights somewhere in West Wickham during the Blitz.

As the bombing of London and Biggin Hill continued, West Wickham saw more and



more damage. In April 1941 more than 20 large bombs plus hundreds of incendiaries fell on the town. "The High Street was ablaze" and the casualties mounted.

In March 1941 five Coney Hall fireman were killed when they went to assist at a fire in Silvertown, East London, and four weeks later 10 more West Wickham fireman died at Poplar (*See Bromleag March 2018*).

One particularly harrowing tragedy occurred in 1942 when six young lads from Coney Hall went to an Army Training Ground at Skids Hill Road. They picked up 15 unexploded smoke bombs and four two-inch trench bombs. One of the bombs exploded while they were examining it in the porch of 113 Layhams Road and four of the boys were killed.

Life in West Wickham was not all "doom and gloom" despite rationing. West Wickham Cricket Club played a match against a Commonwealth Team which included a number of county and overseas players. There was fundraising and support for servicemen activities. Canadian troupes billeted in Coney Hall introduced the jitterbug to a local dancehall. Gardens were turned into allotments, everything was re-cycled and bomb damaged buildings were patched and repaired.

Then in 1944 came the rockets. The first landed on 16 June near Links Road, causing "an incredible amount of damage". Only one resident died but six members of the Hawes Down Heavy Rescue Party were killed in their lorry while driving in Links Road. The V1s continued, causing considerable damage and loss of life, and once



*Bomb  
damage in  
West  
Wickham  
High Street,  
1941*

again children were evacuated. The V2s came next but “fortunately none fell on West Wickham”.

In all 120 people from West Wickham died. Of those, 20 were in the Civil Defence and 41 were civilians. Peter’s researches have uncovered the stories of all those local people and his talk brought home how the war impacted the everyday lives of people living in what may have been presumed to be a very quiet suburb.

By 1945 all branches of the Civil Defence were gradually being stood down and in April the local branch of the British Legion was formed. In May, West Wickham celebrated VE day with street parties and the troops started to return home. A further inscription was added to the War Memorial “In remembrance of those men and women who gave their lives 1939 – 1945.” CH

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## Adding to the history of Kelsey Park

**The history of Kelsey [Andy Callaghan’s talk on the park was reviewed in June’s *Bromleag*] from the time of Peter Burrell’s purchase in 1688 is easily traced but the earlier history is harder to define.**

Most people will relate Kelsey to the current Kelsey public park, which is really a small remnant of the grounds to the original estate. The Kelsey estate at one time stretched from Shortlands to Penge and from Beckenham village to the edges of Hayes but mixed with the other large estates and some properties owned by yeomen. The complexity of land ownership can only begin to be understood from the available maps of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Some questions exist about the origins of Kelsey as the connection with the “de Kelseys”. A reference on British History Online reveals details of William Brograve acquiring land in Beckenham, Bromley, Hayes, Chislehurst etc., which may have either added to land acquired from Kelshulle or even be the major part or total of the Kelsey estate. The absence of maps or descriptions of quantities of land leaves room for speculation.

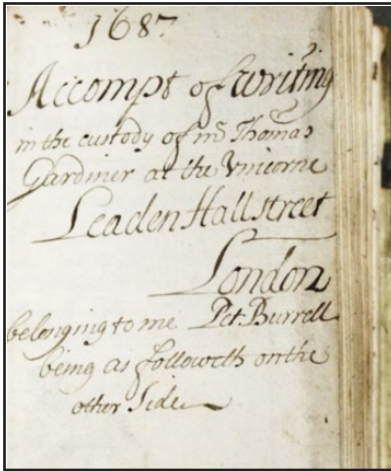
The Brograves are said to have acquired Kelseys from the Kelshulles. Often we can find records of feet of fines with evidence of transfers of land, or wills which describe inheritance.

So far as manor houses are concerned, the Brograves had a house which from map evidence could not have been far from where the entrance to Kelsey Park is today. More detail about the above material is included in our “A History of Beckenham” via [www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk](http://www.beckenhamplaceparkfriends.org.uk) history links which is regularly updated with new material. **Mal Mitchell**

# Life and death in the 17<sup>th</sup> century — a very personal story

Linda Baldwin

**P**eter Burrell (PB1) of Beckenham was born in January 1649/50 in Cuckfield, Sussex, the ninth son and 12<sup>th</sup> child of prominent Iron Master, Walter Burrell. As a young man Peter spent several years in Oporto, Portugal, as a merchant dealing in wine before returning to England and moving to Beckenham in 1684.



© Kent Archives Service

In 1688 he bought “Kelseys” and founded a dynasty of MPs and Baronets.

During a visit to the Kent History and Library Centre in 2019, I transcribed a pocket account book: “U36/F1: Burrell family – account book of Peter Burrell, including account of rents 1687-1694, repairs at Beckenham (no details) 1692; lands purchased 1698-1704”. Tagged on to the end was: “notes on birth and death of children 1687-1701”.

Between the commercial transactions and index were 13 sides of notes in Peter Burrell’s hand concerning his family, from his marriage to the death of their eighth child. Each entry recorded births, baptisms, deaths and funerals, names of clergymen and Godparents and detailed medical information.

## Peter Burrell notes on birth and death of children 1687-1701

In October 1687 the newlyweds lived in St Benet Fink parish, London. Peter was “36 years +10 months” and Isabella had just celebrated her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Within three months, Peter writes:

1687

*December 16 My wife after 4 days sicknesse miscarried having 2 days before been in very great paine occasioned by a false conception of which she being freed the 16<sup>th</sup> being Fryday 20<sup>th</sup> sneezing her frute came from her without any paine.*

*Ditto 20<sup>th</sup> made my will at Holborn + leave it sealed up in my wife’s custody*

## Feature

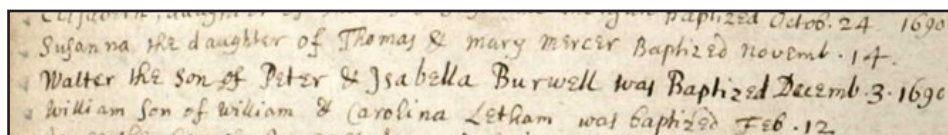
In 1688 his wife's sister died in childbirth and he went to Essex to stand as Godfather for the boy. Peter, who was also trading in bullion in South America, bought "Kelseys" and eventually accumulated land from Kelsey Park Road to Elmers End.

The following year, Isabella gave birth to their eldest daughter, Frances, who would marry Richard Wyatt at Beckenham in 1723. It was usual for married female relatives and friends to keep company with the mother during labour.

1689

*Being Satterday Augt 24<sup>th</sup> at three in the afternoon was borne my daughter Frances Mrs Dodson midwife at whose labour assisted my mother Mrs Hopgood Mrs Pirie Mrs Travanyon Mrs Gardiner + her 2 daughters at Woodscourt in Broad Street in St Benet Frith Parish Christened by Mr Kidder the 3 7ber my mother Merik + my sister Jane Burrell Godmothers (my sister [in-law] Lettice stood for my sister Jane) my Bro[-in-law] Francis Merik Godfather*

Peter stood as Godfather to Francis Merik's daughter at Northcott in Middlesex the following week.



Baptism St Martin Outwich

The birth of Peter's first son, Walter (WB1) the following year occasioned some concern. On this occasion, Peter names his servants who were present at the birth.

1690

*Xber [December] 3 about ¾ past five in the morning was borne my son Walter Burrell + christened the same day at 6 o'clock in the afternoon My Brother Timothy Burrell + Mr Symon Cole Godfathers + my sister Lettice Merike Godmother in Bishopsgate Street in St Martins Outwich parish Xtened by Dean Kidder Mrs Dodson midwife only my mother with our own servants Eliz Terry Eliz Coleman + Nana Gotts present at the birth whom God grant Life + Grace to do much good in his generosity*

Aug 18 1691

*My son Walter tonight was taken with a swelling under his right ear which made him very fractious and unquiet together with his teeth The 24<sup>th</sup> he was given over for Desperett or past recovery having blisters under behind each eare [ ] the 27<sup>th</sup> at half an hour past 10 at night he departed having had many intervalls that gave us hope [ ] but being taken with [ ] a vomiting It so weakened him that he was past all hope*



©Burrell Knepp Castle

On Saturday, 6 August 1692 Peter and Isabella's third child was born at 2.15 am. Only the midwife, one servant and the family are present. Peter offers a prayer that this child may live but, if he could not, that the child be "translated to the Eternall Joy that God grant we may all attain". At three weeks old, Peter (PB2) was baptised having become "dangerously ill".

*It was in God baptized by 2 or 3 in the morning dangerously ill by Gripe [....] He began to be griped + had a lossenesse + cold sweats the Nurse having not milk enough [ ] Mr Berow our Rector perfected the Baptism of my son in my new Dwelling house at Bishopsgate Street the 26<sup>th</sup> Aug [ ] Towards the last 8 days of this mo of 7ber the Boy thrived very much w<sup>ch</sup> God continue*

Young Peter lived to inherit the Kelsey lands and stood as MP for Haslemere

and Dover. It was almost two years before the birth of their fourth child, named Isabella (IB2). Again, Peter was concerned about the baby, who was baptised the next day.

*1694 ...was a very small Child at its Birth my wife sukleing it the Child thrived well but about 6 weeks old my wifes milk Dry<sup>d</sup> up*

At eight months, young Isabella was taking barley milk, a mixture of milk and finely ground barley which is easily digested and used in weaning. But in the early hours of 6 February 1694/5 this "small, plump, very quiet and pretty" baby died, "as was supposed strangled in Vomitting". She was buried beside her brother on the 8 February at St Martin Outwich.

During 1695 the family moved their principal residence from London to Beckenham and Walter (WB1) and Isabella (IB2) were removed from St Martin Outwich.

## Feature

*My son Walter in 1695 were  
Both taken up at St Martins Outwich + carried to Beckenham + Entered  
under our pew in Beckenham Church*

Another son, Merik (MB1), was born in 1696. It was another difficult birth.  
1696

*Laus Deo [ ] 1696 7ber 13<sup>th</sup> about Two in the morning was borne my Third  
son at my house in Bishopsgate Mrs Dodson midwife My wife had a severe  
Labor + the Boy came into the Wor[l]d with his face upward..... Said Babbe  
was Christened the Fryday the 27 9ber + named Merik*

The baptism was performed in November, in their London parish, because  
Isabella's mother was seriously ill at their London house.

1696 -----Dec 16 -----

*My mother Mrs Isabella Merik the Relict of John Merik of London Mercht  
Departed this Life in the Sixty Eighth year of her age having been indisposed  
of a weknesse of stomach about [ ] wich terminated in the entire want of  
Digestion having been confined to her bed about 14 days she wth much  
resignation Left this Life (without the least discomposure) for a better, Divine  
Providence fitt me + all her relations she has left behind her for our Last  
Change + tht we may meet all in a happy resurrection....*

[Margin note] *She dyed at my house in Bishopsgate Street St Martin Outwich  
Parish*

Isabell(a) was the youngest daughter of Sir Thomas Burdett of Foremark,  
Derbyshire and was buried at Northcott beside her husband. Within six months of his  
grandmother's death baby Merik was the first of Peter's children to have a burial  
service at St George's Beckenham.

1697

*Laus Deo the 26 June 1697 [ ] Then Dyed my son Merik having been  
indisposed for [ ] 14 days his distemper we supposed was heeding his Teeth  
+ [ ] wch turned him into a feaver + into fitts when weaker + having Laine  
with great quietnesse he departed about one in the afternoon being Fryday  
giving some Violent screaches Dr Atheton + [ ] all neighbors being present  
at my house in Beckenham + was there interd the 29<sup>th</sup> following at night +  
placed by his Bro + sister under my pew.*

Ten months later another daughter was born, named Isabella (IB3). Peter notes  
that he has amended his will, leaving to Isabella (IB3) that which he had previously  
reserved for the deceased Merik. Isabella married Thomas Dalyson of Kent in 1729



1698

*April 10 being Sunday was Borne my 3<sup>d</sup> daughter Isabella at ½ an hour after 10 at night my wife was delivered by Mrs Tranby of Bromley - fo 79*

He continues:

*From Fo. 85*

*At my 3<sup>d</sup> Daughter Isabella the 2<sup>d</sup>'s birth was my sister Merik Mrs Stile Mrs Gatton Mrs Asheton Mrs Brograve Goodwife Pergrave + my sister Tufnail [ ] She had the navle string around her neck that had almost strangled the child she was christened the day senight [week] at the Parish Church of Beckenham [ ] while 3 Aug she hath continued very thriving shes marked on the left side of her face close by her eare as my wife supposeth for a steak of loine of mutton + some little red spots about her eyelid + forehead*

Peter and Isabella's seventh child, Merrick (MB2), was born at Beckenham. Once again, it was a difficult delivery.

*October 31<sup>st</sup> 1699 Being Teusday was borne my 2<sup>d</sup> son Merrick at about a quarter past eleven in the morning being my 4<sup>th</sup> son and seventh child at Beckenham in Kent My wife was delivered by Mrs Tremby of Bromley in the presence of Mrs Stile my sister Merrick my sister Tuffnail Mrs Brograve [ ] the navell string twice round his neck and once about his arme, which they impute to her stooping to reach thing from the ground and caused the greater difficulty in her delivery.*

Merrick became an MP and 1st Baronet Burrell of West Grinstead

Exceptionally, Peter doesn't give the date or time of birth for their eighth child. Maybe the entry was added some time after the event. The baby, named Walter (WB2), lived less than two weeks and was buried in St George's, Beckenham, with his siblings.

*1700/1*

*Was borne 2<sup>d</sup> son Walter Mrs Stiles + my Bro Merik Godfather was delvd by Mrs Tremby in the presence of Mrs Stile Mrs Gatton + my own family + was baptised same day + lived about 14 days being very weakley from his birth + was intered wth the rest of my children at Beckenham Church under my pew this my 5<sup>th</sup> son + eight child.*

The parish register records Walter's baptism on 5 January, followed 10 days later by his burial.

No further births or deaths are recorded.

However, the Beckenham parish register recorded baptisms of a daughter Ann on 3 May 1702 and son John on 5 September 1703, also John's burial on 8 September

1703.

There are two other entries:

Peter recorded an accident in 1699 involving his young heir.

1699

July 17 ought never to be forgotten about 7 o'clock that evening my son Peter being at his uncle Meriks at Northcott in his yard with his children and most of his servants one of the boys coming with a coach horse from watering he broak lose from the boy turning towards the stable my sons back being towards him he ran upon him + struk him on his face + trod on both his legs with his hind feet yet by the great goodness of Providence the child received little or no hurt ether by the of seeing the horse upon him or by the fall or horses treading on him only the calves of both his legs were something bruised foral Great mercy the God of Heaven be ever praised. I magnified for his goodnesse to ye children of mine.



© Kent Archives Service

In 1701/2 Peter relates another misadventure, this time involving Walter (WB2) at Kelseys. According to reports of the time, there had been a hard frost followed by a severe southerly gale on 29 January, during which ships were wrecked, trees uprooted and buildings damaged in southern England and East Anglia.

1701

No lesse providential was the eminent deliverance of my son Merike the Feb 7<sup>th</sup> th' yeare [ ] being a floud about. In the morning my sister Tuffnail and his sister Isabella walked over the bridge + the wind blowing very hard the boy left them and turned back to goe in + they did not [notice] him but my sister missing him asks the girle where her bro was who told her he was gon in againe she being [ ] on the walke by the great pond an [ ] shott from the bridge her heart misgave her + she turned back againe + comeing to the bridge she sees the boys hatt on the water + looking further saw his blew coat only above the watter she [ ] went down into the river + took the boy up [continued in margin] in all appearance stone dead [ ] my wife foreboding some mischiefe likewise screamed that the servants heard her + all ran to the River where my sister stood wth the child but could not gett up with him her maid gott him from her [ ]

Peter entered the last financial transaction in this account book in 1704.

## **Notes**

For the sake of clarity, I have arranged the events in chronological order. The full transcript can be found at [www.bblhs.org.uk](http://www.bblhs.org.uk).

**The Calendar:** Peter Burrell used the Julian Calendar year: 25 March to 24 March. Autumn months are abbreviated: 7ber (September) 8ber (October) 9ber (November) and Xber (December).

**The Church of St Martin Outwich:** then a 14<sup>th</sup> century church in the City of London, which survived the Great Fire of London, 1666.

## **Houses**

**Beckenham** “Kelseys”, purchased in 1688.

**Bishopsgate Street** London home from 1692 — 1696.

**Northcott, Middlesex** property of Isabell(a) Burdett before her marriage to John Merike, and later bequeathed to their daughter Ann. The Merike family graves are within the Church of St Mary, Norwood Green, Middlesex.

**Woodscourt, Broad Street** first London home, 1687-1692.

## **Family**

“My brother/sister” means my sibling or my spouse’s sibling.

Ladies used their Christian name until marriage, thereafter their husband’s surname “my sister Lettice” and “my sister Tuffnail” are both Lettice (Merik) Tuffnail.

## **Sources**

Kent History and Library Centre, Kent Archives Service

Reproductions of the account book, ref U36/F1, by kind permission of KHLC, Kent Archives Service.

## **Bromley Historic Collections**

Transcriptions of St George’s Beckenham Registers by Leland Duncan (1899) and Jean Rawlings (c1975) Ref: P/19/1/2

**Sussex Archaeological Collections** Volume XLIII, published 1900

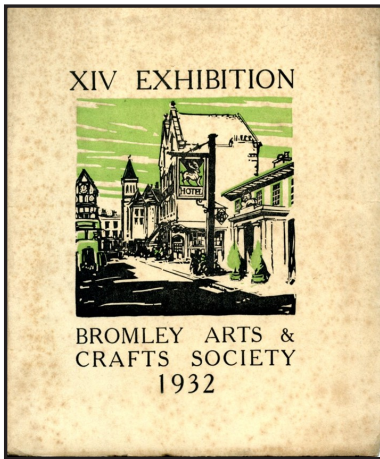
[www.ancestry.co.uk/](http://www.ancestry.co.uk/)

[www.findmypast.co.uk/](http://www.findmypast.co.uk/)

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude for the help received from the staff at Kent Archives Service and Bromley Local Studies, who have been so encouraging. Also, many thanks to Keith Baldwin for researching and constructing pedigrees of the Burrell and Merik families and their many offspring.

## 'Gentle loveliness' — Bromley Arts & Crafts



One of the benefits of the recent pandemic has been the opportunity for people to do a bit of clearing out of dusty attics and the backs of over-filled cupboards.

One Bromley resident recently rediscovered some bits and pieces left to him many years ago which he had never examined. His first reaction was to chuck them away but, at his daughter's suggestion he put them on eBay instead — where I spotted them.

Arts & Crafts have long been a tradition in Bromley and it is not surprising therefore that exhibitions of work go back well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the First World War, it seems societies in Bromley and Beckenham frequently

cooperated for these activities although Bromley held biennial shows of its own.

It was four issues of the Bromley Arts & Crafts Society exhibitions, dated 1932, 1934, 1936 and 1937 (presumably they were to become annual) which had narrowly escaped the rubbish bin. President of the Society (and of many other local organisations) was Archibald Cameron Norman of The Rookery on Bromley Common. The Chairman was Lady Dorcas Bower, wife of Sir Alfred Louis Bower, a former Lord Mayor of London, of Manor Place, Manor Park, Chislehurst.

The cover of the 1932 catalogue, the 14<sup>th</sup> such, pictures the White Hart in Bromley High Street, along with the old town hall, and it was in the White Hart Entertainment Hall that the four-day event took place, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of November. Exhibits had to be delivered by 4 pm on Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup> and could not be removed until Monday the 28<sup>th</sup>.

The White Hart had for many years been the centre of much activity in Bromley, from inquests and protest meetings to exhibitions and cricket matches. The exhibition had seven sections: Painting, Drawing, Sculpture and Metal Work, Leatherwork, Applied Design, Needlework and Lace, and School or Children. Most items were for sale, ranging from a painting at £31-10s down to a one shilling matchbox or ring. Robert Morley & Co, who had their shop in Aberdeen Buildings, were also offering a miniature grand piano in mahogany for 100 guineas (£105).

In its coverage of the exhibition, the *Bromley & Kentish Times* reported it had been opened by Mrs Ronald (Mary) Campbell, daughter of Lady Lennard who had been expected to perform this duty but was instead attending the funeral of her brother,

Major General Albemarle Cator. Mrs Campbell was joined on the platform by various members of the committee and received a bouquet of thanks from little Miss Anthea Packe (daughter of a committee member) who “caused amusement by joining in the ensuing applause”. Music from Miss Phyllis Harding’s 10-piece orchestra followed the opening ceremony. While praising the quality of the exhibits and describing many of them, the article quickly gave reassurance that the “visitor will not find here any startling invasion into the realms of rude or crude Modernism ... the spirit of the exhibition is one of gentle loveliness”.

There were more than 60 different exhibitors in 1932, although many had several items to exhibit, and three prizes were on offer for “studies in any medium”. This changed over the following years to prizes – still unspecified — for each of the sections and by 1937 the number of exhibitors had more than doubled.

Also, the catalogues after 1932 ceased to have any picture on the front cover but continued to be printed by Strong and Sons from their building in East Street that had also become the home of the *Bromley and Kentish Times*.



In 1936, perhaps because of the increase in size, the exhibition had moved to the “Constitutional Hall” in The Broadway. This was in Bromley Lodge, long the home of the Conservative club and by this time the Bromley Constitutional Club (*marked on the map, left*). It was on the site of what is now the rear of Poundland (previously C&A and then Woolworths).

**Bromley Lodge:** The picture of Bromley Lodge on the back page of this edition of *Bromleag* may date to around 1875, before the Broadway was created and the front garden disappeared under new shops. Main access was then at the rear via Elmfield Park. Originally, the Lodge was the only

building between the White Hart and the Gravel Pit (now Bromley South) and covered around 20 acres, the building in the picture, in part at least, having been built around 1792.

It was occupied by a series of wealthy and well-connected people before ceasing to be used as a residence in the early 1870s, which may account for its somewhat run-down appearance, with the park area and the Broadway starting to be developed at this time. The surrounding land was sold off in 1874 and the building finally demolished in the late 1960s. **Max Batten**

*My thanks to Simon and Kate at Bromley Central Library for their help in preparing this article.*

# The silent cinema of Beckenham

Jane Carleton

**I** was delighted recently to uncover some of the history of the silent screen in Beckenham. The Pavilion, a “cinematograph” cinema (telephone Bromley 1863) once stood on the south-west corner of the junction of the High Street with Village Way, now the site of Beckenham Pharmacy.



The *Beckenham Journal* in August 1914 described its arrival as filling “a long felt want in Beckenham, which has hitherto been entirely unprovided for in the way of amusements”. Designed to seat 1,000, its grand opening on 31 October 1914 was a special performance (prices 2s-6d, 1s-6d or one shilling) including “the latest films from the seat of war” (the outbreak of WW1 having been declared two months previous) and high-class patriotic music, the proceeds from which went to the Beckenham War Relief Fund.

The Pavilion (pictured above) would have screened a mixture of short and feature length silent films with piano accompaniment, at a time when film entertainment (the “movies”) was becoming a huge business. I have found specific reference to *The Ragamuffin* with Mary Pickford (1919), programme from 1920 pictured in August 1914, and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927). Certainly many other classics of the era, such as Buster Keaton’s *The General* (1926) and Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Lodger* (1927) would also have been shown.

To get a measure of the growth of the film industry from its early days, we could look at the, admittedly untypical, career of Charlie Chaplin, who first visited the USA in 1910 with the Fred Karno vaudeville company. In 1913 he was hired by the





Keystone Studios at \$150 a week, with his film debut — an 11-minute short — following in 1914. The following year, changing studios, his salary shot up to \$1,000 a week and two years later another new studio was paying him \$10,000 a week. And, of course, those earnings continued to grow.

Bromley Historic Collections hold some charming personal items in their archive which tell us the Pavilion was operated by the South London Cinema Company, and was at one time managed by Miss A Jordan. The written acknowledgement of her letter of resignation in 1924 has been preserved along with a good luck message from the 11 “Ladies and Gentlemen of the Pavilion”.

Despite, early in the 1930s, being equipped to present “talkies”, the Pavilion closed in 1933 and was demolished the following year. Another, much larger, cinema had opened on the war memorial roundabout in 1930 which surely meant that the Pavilion was no longer viable. This new cinema complex was initially called the Regal, then the ABC, and is now known as the multi-screen Odeon. When it opened it contained a 2,000-seat cinema with Wurlitzer organ, a ballroom, restaurant and — sign of the times — parking for 200 cars.

*The Pavilion from the 1920s contrasting with one taken by me earlier this year from the same viewpoint. How lovely to see the Ardec (opened in 1925) shop signage on the parade of shops on the right in both photographs.*

Historic images courtesy of the Cinema Theatres

Association Archive and Bromley Historic Collections.



Following the end of the First World War, there was a wave of strikes within the military. In the second part of her article on “The Great Unrest” **Pam Preedy** looks at two that affected Bromley.

## Mutiny at RAF Biggin Hill

**T**he RAF was formed on 1 April 1918 by combining the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). By that stage of the First World War the Air Ministry had recognised the importance of wireless communications from land to air and air-to-air between pilots.

The Wireless Experimental establishment was originally stationed at Joyce Green, at Long Reach just north of Dartford, a Vickers aeroplane testing site also used by an RFC unit as a permanent airfield base from early in the war. Unfortunately, the area suffered from flooding, making it unsuitable for training young pilots. There were many other hazards for the trainees, such as ditching in the Thames within half a mile, crashing into the Vickers TNT works, hitting some of the high chimney stacks in the area, sinking in a vast sewage farm, coming down on a large isolation hospital or being electrocuted in an electrical substation with acres of pylons and cables. Flying was notoriously dangerous at the time and many trainees crashed.

The RFC transferred to Biggin Hill on 13 February 1917 and after the war the Wireless Research Station also transferred from Joyce. In March 1918, at vast expense, plans began on permanent buildings for South Camp, which was to be expanded by an Officers’ Mess, barrack blocks, laboratories and concrete hangars. It would cost £220,000 and take two years to complete.

Almost 600 people — 68 officers, 297 men and 228 members of the Women’s Royal Air Force — were living there in temporary buildings. During the winter of 1918-19 conditions were appalling. More than 500 were living in tents or the few leaking huts that remained. There was no hot water, no heating and mud was everywhere. Cooking in an open, rusty shed and eating in a canvas hangar with its roof in shreds and in a morass of mud was almost impossible. The food was, not surprisingly, unsatisfactory. Although complaints had been made, the authorities had ignored them.

In January 1919, after a particularly unpalatable meal, the men met to discuss their problems and various actions were suggested: an all-out strike, marching down Piccadilly to present their case to the Air Ministry. Others just sang *The Red Flag* at the top of their voices.

Next day, no-one turned out for duty and the men refused to recognise the authority of the orderly officer. The men removed the magnetos [electric generators] from all vehicles, both military and civilian. They were supported in their endeavours

by men of 141 Squadron stationed in the neighbouring North Camp. A deputation was sent to the well-liked Commanding Officer Colonel Blanchy and their demands presented. They included measures to prevent victimisation and gave sources of evidence for their complaint, including the Medical Officer who, when examining those on the sick list, said the complaints were due to the disgraceful conditions; the food and sanitary arrangements. Among other things they wanted Major \_\_\_ dismissed, temporary release for those awaiting demobilisation and, above all, that the camp should be put into a habitable condition. Following this there was a detailed list of all their complaints about both sanitary conditions and food.

It was agreed that Colonel Blanchy would accompany the men to the Area HQ at Covent Garden to support their case and the magnetos were replaced in sufficient vehicles to transport the delegation.

Ultimately, Brigadier General ACH McLean investigated. He was appalled by the conditions and threatened to cancel the contract with the builders unless everything was put right. Then it was announced that all officers and men could go home on leave until the camp was improved. When they returned, South Camp looked a great deal better and the mutiny was over.

## The Royal Army Service Corps in Shortlands, Soldiers' Strike 1919

**The Armistice had been signed, people thought the men would soon be demobilised and could come home. But it would take time for all of them to return from far-flung places and then go through the demob process.**

Some men would be needed to form the Army of Occupation in Germany. In addition, in the post-war year Lloyd George was in favour of limited intervention in Russian affairs, supporting the White Russians against the "Reds" in an effort to curb the influence of Bolshevism into Europe. Soldiers themselves had something to say about this.

On Friday 3 January 1919 notices were posted; 1,000 troops were due to parade for embarkation at Folkestone at 8.15 am and a further 1,000 men at 8.25 am. But across the notices had been written the ominous words "No men to parade". Word had passed from rest camp to rest camp and after a meeting of nearly 3,000 men they had decided not to march down to the boats. Instead, they marched to the town hall to see the Mayor of Folkestone. As they marched they shouted: "Are we going to France? No! Are we going home? Yes!" Over 10,000 men assembled at the town hall. Their disaffection was twofold: demobilisation was taking too long – there were men with jobs waiting for them -- and they were unwilling to serve in another war, this time in Russia. Their fears had been boosted by propaganda in the press saying that

## *Feature*

demobilisation would have to be delayed until the political and military situation was sufficiently clear.

This press propaganda was followed by press complaints of delays in demobilisation and contrasting the British experience with those of French and American soldiers, where the process was much quicker.

The British had a system, but it was slow. Men were classified according to the value of their jobs. "Pivotal men" were those needed as industries or sections of industries or even factories were changing from war work to civilian work. The next category were the "slip men" — any man who could prove he had a job waiting for him by producing a "slip" or certificate from an employer.

The process of demobilisation itself took time. First a man had to be medically examined. He would then be provided with a form which would allow him to make a claim for any disability arising from his military service. A range of other forms had to be issued and filled out. All locally-issued foreign bank notes had to be exchanged by the holder before leaving the country of issue on his way to a transit camp and then to a Dispersal Centre in England. There the soldier would receive a plethora of certificates and forms: a railway warrant or a ticket to his home station; a certificate to allow him to receive medical attention if needed during his final leave; an "Out-of-work Donation Policy" which ensured him against unavoidable unemployment for up to 26 weeks in the 12 months following demobilisation; an advance of pay; a fortnight's ration book; a voucher for the return of his great coat at a railway station while he was on leave; a clothing allowance of 52 shillings and sixpence (£2-12s-6d) or a suit of plain clothes — a "demob suit".

Finally, he was dispersed and began his final leave, still in uniform and with his steel helmet and greatcoat. Although technically a soldier, he could now wear plain clothes. After 28 days he could no longer wear his uniform. By this time he would have returned his greatcoat to a railway station in exchange for one pound. Any outstanding payments due to him were sent in three instalments by Money Orders or Postal Drafts to be cashed at a Post Office on production of a Protection Certificate. He would also have to exchange his Demobilisation Ration Book for an Emergency Card and later a civilian Ration Book.

A footnote in the *Bromley & District Times* suggested: "The Army authorities [were] doing their utmost to keep the daily rate of demobilisation up to 40,000 men which is, at present the maximum capacity of the arrangement."

There were about 3.8 million in the British forces at the Armistice. By the end of 1919 there were about 900,000 men. In 1922 there were still 230,000 awaiting demobilisation.

Demobilisation was not moving quickly enough for the men in Folkestone. The

unrest spread quickly, first to Dover and then through Kent to reach Scotland and Wales and France. In January, 1919, the men from the Army Service Corps (ASC) based in Shortlands, south-west of Bromley town centre, felt that they, too, had waited long enough for demobilisation and protested. "The delay in putting into effective operation the scheme for demobilising men from the Army, and particularly those who have jobs, or their own businesses to go to, is apparently creating trouble all over the country, and the men themselves are making vigorous protests and representations ..."

A deputation of 1,100 or 1,200 men from the Shortlands Depot marched to the Central Hall to protest. The protest seems to have achieved a positive result: "Towards the end of the meeting a deputation was sent back to the depot, to inform the men that it had been agreed that demobilisation should start as from Wednesday, and that 400 men would be sent away during the next fortnight."

For the majority of men involved in these strikes demobilisation was speeded up and the conditions of those remaining were improved.

Ultimately — in spite of men such as Winston Churchill who wanted to send a large army of occupation to Russia to bring about order -- Lloyd George made a speech to parliament on 16 April, 1919, entitled, *The Greatest Act of Stupidity*. He said: "I would rather leave Russia Bolshevik until she sees her way out of it than see Britain bankrupt. And that is the surest road to Bolshevism in Britain." He thought the sheer numbers and expense of sending troops to Russia and keeping them there for a prolonged period would be exorbitant. Between March and October 1919, troops were withdrawn from Russian territories and the provision of supplies to the White Russians withdrawn a month later. Demobilisation continued at home.



*The Army Service Corps was believed to have been based at Oakwood House, which was used for military headquarters for Army lorries. The house was pulled down about 1930 when Ashmere Avenue was built*

# The Bromley North Railway – the first 50 years

*The concluding part of **Max Batten's** history of the line's early years as we moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

**T**he foot crossing at the north end of Bromley North station which marked a long-established right of way was finally replaced by a footbridge around 1905, a few yards north of the foot crossing (this in turn was replaced by something far more magnificent in 2014). As houses were built in Babbacombe Road, so the old path was adjusted but it still winds its way between rows of houses, finally emerging into Sundridge Parade on Plaistow Lane.

In 1902 the lines through Grove Park were quadrupled, which necessitated considerable rebuilding. The effects of this can be observed on the platform canopy stanchions which, in many cases carry the date 1902, just visible under layers of paint. The bay platform was turned into a loop allowing trains from Bromley to run directly up to London without blocking the main line. The station then assumed something like its present day form with the addition to the Down-side carriage sidings (now covered by the houses in Amblecote Meadow) and Up-side sidings, one between the branch platform and the Station Master's house (now replaced by Pullman Mews) and the others on either side of the curve away from the branch platform next to the signal box. These have all now been removed.

Operational problems still occurred, however. On Tuesday 3 September 1901, as the "express engine" to take the 08.26 train to Cannon Street came out of the siding at Bromley, it became derailed. The next train to run was not until 09.55 by which time many passengers had decamped to Bromley South and the engine was not re-railed until 10.30.

More seriously, in October 1904 Walter Henry Bosanquet left his home in Hope Park in Bromley, apparently to attend the evening service at St Mary's in College Road. Instead, later that evening, his mutilated body was found on the railway line at Sundridge Park station near the Lansdown Road bridge. A long-time resident and former church warden, active in public life and first Chairman of the Urban District Council (which replaced the Local Board in 1894), his demise came as a considerable shock. At the inquest, however, it was noted, that following the death of his wife in 1892, his mental and physical health had declined and finding the church crowded with parishioners saying farewell to the vicar, the Rev John Bond, it was considered



possible “he proceeded to the railway station and missed his footing and fell across the metals”. A perhaps kindly verdict of accidental death was brought in; the presence in the room of his brother, Admiral Bosanquet, and his son in law, the Rev WS Flynn, may have encouraged this outcome.

That this was not just a passenger railway is made clear by, for example, a letter dated as early as 24 June 1879 and signed by the Local Board Surveyor, Hugh Cregeen, for tenders to deliver 150 cubic yards of broken Kentish ragstone to Bromley and Grove Park stations for the road building programme. Adverts continued to appear from the Urban District and, after 1904, the Borough Council, for the supply of road materials to their private siding on the west side of the station yard. A typical advert shows the requirement for a substantial quantity of broken stone to be delivered to the yard for onward carriage by road, amounting to around 100 railway wagon loads.

In July 1910, at a Council meeting having first approved the borrowing of £11,712 to build a secondary school for boys (now Ravensbourne School in Hayes Lane), the General Purposes Committee requested that the railway company should be approached over the desirability of issuing third-class season tickets; a general reduction of fares; <sup>1</sup> the necessity of rebuilding Bromley North station and the



*Sundridge Park prior to electrification, with a steam train heading for Bromley North.*

## *Feature*

inadequate platform accommodation at Sundridge Park station. There is no evidence of any positive outcome.

Thursday 9 May 1912 saw what was perhaps potentially the most serious accident at Bromley North. Overenthusiastic shunting propelled some trucks into three covered wagons sitting at the end of the siding that ended at the side of the Station Master's office. With only a baulk of timber at the end of the line, the wagons were pushed into the wall of the office, causing it to collapse with considerable damage to the inside. Happily, Mr Wood the Station Master had just left the office and his clerk, who shared the room, was in the Parcels office.

In the same year there was an even more unfortunate event when on Monday 15 July Frederick Southby, the foreman carriage cleaner at Bromley North, found the body of a day-old child wrapped in a piece of brown paper tied up with string under the seat in a first class compartment. Neither the child nor its parents were ever identified.

On 18 September 1913 an engine being turned on the turntable at Bromley North ran beyond the end of the rails and the front four wheels became embedded in the ground. A crowd of onlookers then had an entertaining few hours while a large number of men dug it out and levered it up so that spare rails could be placed under it and it could be rolled back on to the permanent track.

In late 1914, probably as a result of the war and the heavy use of Bromley South for ambulance trains and with its more restricted coal yard, plans were drawn up to extend the sidings at Bromley North and install an extra siding, known as a head shunt, alongside the Up-line as it descended towards Sundridge Park station. This necessitated a level piece of ground and a concrete wall being built for part of the length to support it, which can still be seen. The head shunt, which extended nearly all the way to Sundridge Park, allowed sorting of trucks and a whole train to be assembled without going on to the running lines until actually departing for Hither Green.

With the exigencies of war, the new facilities were brought into use on 22 February 1915 but the Chief Inspecting Officer, Colonel Pelham George Von Donop RE, (incidentally, godfather to PG Woodhouse, hence the author's Christian names) was only contacted for approval on 4 March. Clearly they were busy, as the inspection was finally carried out on 24 September, the company being advised all was well three days later.

## **Station Masters**

In the earliest days of the railways the Station Master was just that, in charge of everyone and everything that happened on the station or the adjacent track. It was only with the Beeching era and the increase in technology and reduction in

staffing that the role lost much of its former importance.

In the early days they were often well-known personalities, performing as they did a joint function of local manager and public relations officer. For example, in 1904 when Mr Christer at Sundridge Park retired after 49 years' service — 20 as a guard and the last 18 of them at Sundridge Park — a collection of £80 was made and the event was reported at some length in the *Bromley Record*. Sadly, he died of cancer in a nursing home in Rodway Road in June the following year aged 67 and was buried in Plaistow Cemetery. His funeral was attended by a large number of railway staff, including station masters Messrs Pain from Bromley North and Ramsay from Grove Park as well as his replacement at Sundridge Park, Mr Smart, together with the booking clerk C Nutting and two porters, R Wilson and A Boorman. For the record, the station masters during this period were:

Bromley North

1874-1884	G. T. Swann*
1885-1896	Walter Capon
1897-1901	John Barden
1902-1906	W. H. Pain
1907-1919	William John Wood
1920-1921	William Hilder
1923†	John Thomas

\* Also Sundridge Park until 1882

Sundridge Park

1882-1886	J. A. Solley
1887-1904	Edward Christer
1905-1906	J. H. Smart
1907-1910	Bertram John Caudell
1911	W. C. Hunt
1912-1915	Albert John Bryant
1919	Henry Pearson
1920-1924	Henry Piercy

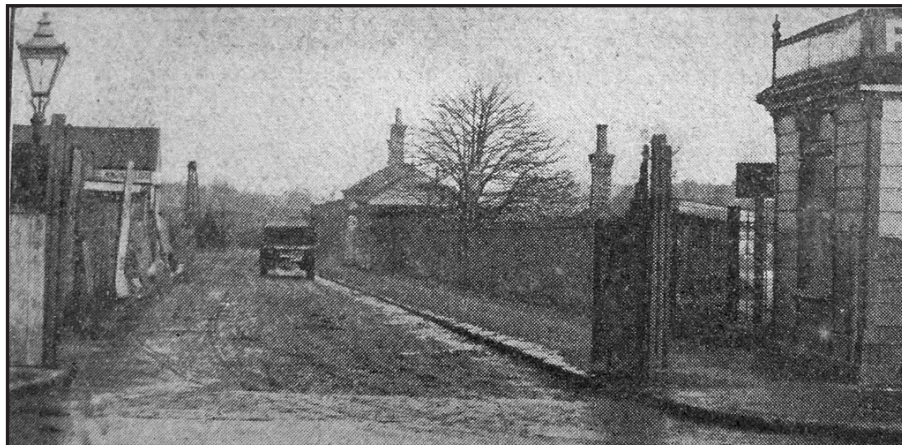
†Also Station Master Bromley South and, from 1924, Sundridge Park

## Southern Railway Days

Complaints about Bromley North station rumbled on into the new century. Because of the various plans before, during and after the building of the line — most of which were based on it taking a different route after leaving Sundridge Park — it has been suggested that the reluctance to spend much money on passenger facilities was in part due to the idea that, one day, something might happen.

Having become a town when it received its municipal charter in 1903 and with a population of over 30,000 people, Bromley's first mayor Frank Griffiths<sup>2</sup> invited SER director and chief engineer Percy (later Sir) Tempest to discuss improvements to match the town's new status but, as usual, nothing happened. Indeed, in an interview the previous September, Sir Percy had explained in detail how great the new four-track line from New Cross to Orpington and the new Chislehurst tunnel and enlarged stations like Grove Park would be, but had added that Bromley North "would be taking its turn". And there the interview ended.

By the time the Southern Railway (SR) took control in 1924 — one of the big four



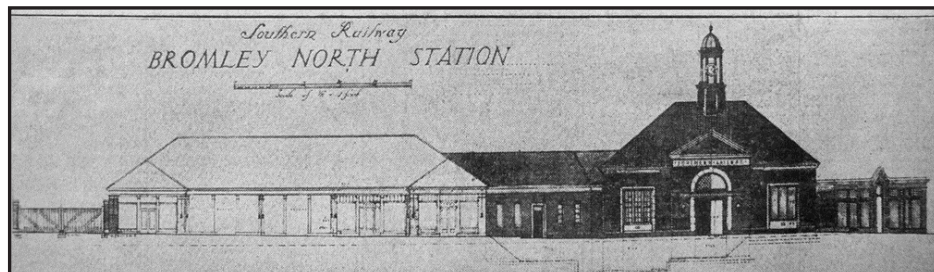
*The undignified Station Approach: picture from the District Times 5 December 1924 showing the main station building and its access road.*

railway companies created by the Railways Act 1921 - Bromley North was a run-down terminus with a hotchpotch of wooden buildings, covered in copious amounts of grime and approached by a muddy track, *see picture above*

So, when in November 1924, as part of its £8 million electrification scheme the SR issued a notice about train alterations headed "Rebuilding – Bromley North Station", it was not surprising the one happy newspaper reader wrote on his copy "At last"!

Work started in December 1924 and meant some services would be restricted with only the "Up" or departure side in use during the initial rebuilding work. This enabled demolition work on the "Down" side, the site of which would later become host to the current island platform, the old Down line being pretty much where Platform One is today. In effect, the station moved east.

The turntable was an early casualty of the rebuilding programme, its site being required for the erection of the new ticket office. A water column was, however, maintained at the southern end of the remaining "Up" platform during the works.



These were sufficiently advanced by 27 December 27 1925 for the new double-sided platform to be brought into use. The rebuilding work was not finally completed until well into 1926 when the existing “Up” side structures of the SER were demolished to make way for a completely reorganised goods yard. During the work, the Council allowed its own rail-served depot in Station Road to be used by the public.

The new station was a grand affair costing £32,000 (*see artist’s impression on opposite page*) perhaps to compensate for the years of neglect. It included 11 shops, six fronting Tweedy Road, one facing the station forecourt and four in Sherman Road. There was to be a large bookstall, tobacco kiosk, three telephone boxes plus general and ladies’ waiting rooms. The wide single platform surface with two faces, made of prefabricated concrete components, was some 520-feet in length and was protected for half its length by a riveted steel canopy. The station boasted a completely covered but light and airy concourse measuring 60 feet wide by 40 feet between the barriers and ticket hall and arranged in the form of three glazed pitched roof sections. This was fronted by the main station building, which was divided into two sections.

Brown brick construction was used throughout, complete with stone edging. The 780-square foot booking hall was equivalent to three storeys in height and with an impressive stone-lined arched entrance. The building incorporating a large pyramid-shaped slated roof graced with the then-popular belfry, 60 feet high. The original plans for it to incorporate a clock, however, appear to have got no further than the artist’s impression. The row of six shops were demolished as part of the more recent Tweedy Road widening but the others remain identifiable.

From the booking hall to the west was a 70-foot long single-storey extension. For much of its length this section of building was let out for private retail use, an increasingly common event. On the Sherman Road side a similar-length building was built at right angle to the main block and tapered to fit in the available space. This also had an ornate entrance, although its initial purpose is not wholly clear unless plans to build the mail sorting office opposite a couple of years later were already under consideration. Of particular note, according to a newspaper report in March 1925, would be the heating of the ticket hall by means of pipes built into the walls, thus avoiding unsightly radiators. This “latest idea” would be matched by the General and Ladies waiting rooms with wood-block floors and the “fixtures of the latest type”.

It was hoped the new station would be completed by the end of the year. However, a year later, with work still ongoing, one critic suggested that Bromley *North* was an appropriate name because of “its freezing accommodation” akin to conditions in Alaska. One feature, much commented on over the years, was the complete lack of integration with local bus services, which for many years lurked only 50 yards away but completely out of sight in North Street.



## **Electrification**

In March 1913 residents of Garden Road, parallel to the railway line just north of Sundridge Park, petitioned the Council over the “inconvenience and damage arising from the emission of black smoke, ashes and cinders from the South-Eastern Railway engines approaching and leaving Sundridge Park Station”.

So, better late than never, they must have been pleased when the first trial runs of electric trains started on 19 November 1925. The service was delayed from the planned 1 December due to electricity supply problems and the commercial service from Bromley North, Orpington, Hayes and Addiscombe started running from Sunday 28 February 1926.

In their launch publicity SR warned that there might be delays for a few days, despite testing and training, as signalmen in particular became used to the higher frequency of service. A slight hiccup occurred at midnight on Monday 3 May when the line was closed by the National Strike. With the help of volunteers it was reopened a week later. The full service was introduced on Monday 19 July 1926. Prior to electrification there were 37 Up and 33 Down trains (16/16 on Sundays). Afterwards, there were 54 Up and 52 Down trains (32/32 on Sunday) with the fastest train time to Charing Cross reduced from 31 to 23 minutes, which one can only dream of today.

At the same time, the platforms at Sundridge Park station were extended to handle eight-coach trains. This required the rebuilding of the bridge carrying Plaistow Lane and, with the encouragement of the Council, the opportunity was taken to widen the roadway.

Although the line continued to be an important commuter station, as well as having sizable off-peak traffic, there was inevitably some decline in freight between the wars as roads and goods vehicles increased in quality and number. The Council siding fell into disuse and by 1936 had become a car park, as it is today. The period up to the early 1960s saw the line at its peak and although no closure is planned, its utilisation remains something of a problem and the limited shuttle service is a sad reminder of the glory days.

<sup>1</sup> However, in a comparison carried out in 1895 the average cost per mile on the SER was 4.65d per mile, compared with for example with the LCDR, 4.80d, the LBSCR, 5.58d and the GWR, 6.74d per mile.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel Frank Griffiths VD (1861-1917), son of a local printer/stationer, lived at The Gables in Plaistow Lane. He was variously President of Bromley FC, Kent County FA and Sundridge Park Golf Club. He rose to be a Colonel in the TA during WW1 and died from pneumonia caught while attending a military camp.



*The picture below was taken to mark the launch of the new electric service. It was published under the heading*

## **TWENTIETH CENTRY BROMLEY**

### **FIRST ELECTRIC TRAIN OUT FROM THE NEW STATION AT BROMLEY NORTH**

The photo is in two parts, as can be seen by the one-and-a-half small boys. Perhaps the arrival of some better-dressed passengers led to the second right hand photograph being taken, but the join has been a bit rough with the coach being made longer and the man looking out of the window also making a repeat appearance just above the lady's hat!

Beneath the clearly incomplete station canopies is the 08.02 to London with Station Master John Thomas (twice) standing next to Motorman H Hope and Guard W Moore just prior to departure. The coach bodies are almost certainly rebuilt from old steam-hauled six-wheel and four-wheel coaches and made into three-car units.



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