



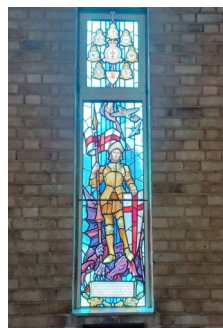
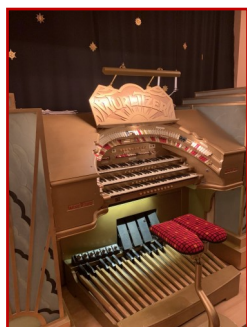
Bromleag

The journal of the Bromley Borough Local History Society

Issue 63, September 2022



Bromley town centre — the gift of a special garden



**History spiced with music, nature and
remembrance on our summer visits**

Bromleag

*The journal of the Bromley Borough
Local History Society*



Contents

News and Events

Keston Common walk and history	5
West Wickham organ museum	7
Biggin Hill Chapel and museum	8

Society meeting

Philanthropist Alfred Brown	10
The cemeteries of South London	12

Comments and Queries

Pettigrove's funfair	14
18 th century Bromley murder	15
Hayes WWII rescue	17
New Cator map of Beckenham	19

Features

Neelgherries and Bromley Library Gardens	22
Beckenham War Memorial and Cottage Hospital	26
Bromley Congregational Church, Widmore Road	29
Crofton Place Farm and the Staples family	33

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 October 2022

BBLHS Meetings

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 1 October Florence Nightingale in London — Julie Chandler

Tuesday 1 November Early workhouses in the Bromley area — Kate Hollis

Kate takes a look at what provision was made for the poor in the many workhouses of Bromley that existed before 1834 and the creation of the Union Workhouse in Farnborough

Tuesday 6 December Three Houses in Bexley — Hazel Beale

A virtual tour around the history of some exceptional properties in our neighbouring borough. William Morris's home the *Red House*, Grade I listed *Hall Place*, which is a rare pristine example of an country house style of the 16th century; and the 18th century Palladian villa at Danson Park.

Local heritage events in September

Scadbury Manor Open Weekend 2pm — 5pm 10-11 September

Orpington & District Archaeological Society will be giving tours around the manor house site in Scadbury Park, Chislehurst.

St Martin's Church, Chelsfield, 10am — 4pm Saturday 10 September, Church Road, Chelsfield BR6 7SN

Displays of the church's historic records, some dating back to the 16th century special altar frontal vestments by a local embroiderer who worked at Westminster Abbey, local history photographic displays and a recently donated 13th century Papal Bulla. There will also be churchyard tours.

Talk: Not Forgotten — The Crooked Billet, 11am Saturday 17 September Southborough Lane Baptist Church, Southborough Lane, BR2 8BQ.

Jennie Randall will give a free talk on what happened when a V2 rocket destroyed the Crooked Billet (now a Harvester) Southborough Lane, Bromley in November 1944 and how all those killed and injured are now commemorated on a blue plaque

Who's Who on the BBLHS committee

www.bblhs.org.uk

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Out and about this summer

It has been great this year to get back to the simple delight of a day out without any restrictions. Of course, back in the winter we were not to know that life would be back to normal this summer and that was when our programme of talks and visits was being planned. Or, in the case of the latter, not planned.

But as soon as it became clear visits would work and be welcomed by members, Programme Co-ordinator Mike Marriott swung into action and we had four varied and fascinating visits in place over the summer – three of which are reported on in this issue.

Visits are enlightening and entertaining but they also give members a chance to talk to and get to know other members over a longer space of time than is available at meetings — something we all enjoy doing.

There was also a special element as three of the visits were organised by members themselves – Tudor Davies guided a walk around Keston, John Barnes arranged a visit to an unusual and private organ collection and Pam Preedy – a volunteer at Biggin Hill museum – organised a museum visit. Actually, even our fourth visit, a London guided walk, was led by Mike Marriott.

So if you have a connection to a historical place why not drop Mike a line and help him set up another set of entertaining summer visits for 2023? **Editor**

Flora, fauna and history on Keston Common

Keston Common is known for Caesar's Well and its ponds and although we started our walk around the common just above the "well" it was a much more varied, and at times hidden, history that our former chairman Tudor Davies revealed in a summer walk on the common.

Hidden by the passage of time and vegetation is a small bank and ditch that was once an addition to Iron Age fort (250-150 BCE), without a guide we would have walked across and by it unaware of its existence.

Centuries after it was built, most of the "fort" was included in the Holwood Estate, which lies to the east of the common, and thundering along between the common and the estate is the A223 Westerham Road. Until 1789 this road was a simple track across the Common and the Bromley-Westerham turnpike road passed close to Holwood House.

But Prime Minister William Pitt, the then owner, was given permission to enclose a chunk of the common into his estate and move the road from in front of his house to its present route. All that roadbuilding and the landscaping of Holwood required a

Society visit

lot of moving of earth and digging out of gravel and Tudor pointed out where this had altered the landscape, including creating gravel pits that later became the Keston ponds.

This was not just a history walk. Tudor, who is a “friend” of Keston Common and helps with its maintenance, told us the area – now wooded – was once mainly scrub and grass and the friends have to keep control of the gorse that now grows in abundance. He pointed out the non- native trees, mainly conifers, that were planted in the 1920s when our dependence on imported timber was appreciated.

Having skirted round the Westerham Road edge of the common we came into Heathfield Road, where some of Keston’s most historic buildings lie. The original 1855 national school, as can be seen from the picture below, is relatively unaltered. Farm labourers’ children came from several miles around to the two-room school until 1974 when it moved to a new site. Since then it has been a religious study centre, a management company and has now been sympathetically converted to housing.

The Village Hall, completed in 1933, was built as a lasting memorial to the war dead and opposite it is the war memorial erected in 1923.

Slightly further along the road is Keston Mill. Unfortunately, we were not able to visit, but Tudor told us that the post mill is the oldest remaining mill in Kent with much of its original machinery inside. It was certainly a good business to be in because the Fuller family, who owned it from 1660s to late 18th century, were one of the wealthiest families in the village*.

Finally, we skirted the top of the common above the ponds and to our left we could see Ravensbourne House, where there is a fourth pond created by Maria Bonham-Carter, the 19th century owner of Ravensbourne House (another building now turned into apartments).

This recreational pond was used as a boating lake by her and later owners, all of whom introduced exotic imported plants, including Japanese knotweed, that now have to be kept under control.

And so we came back to the fishponds and “Caesar’s Well” — which is, in fact, a spring and has no connection with Caesar — having discovered a great deal about this relatively small common on a delightful walk. **CH**



**An article, by Tudor, on the Fuller family will be published in December Bromleag*

Organs galore on our doorstep

In June, 14 BBLHS members and friends were able to enjoy an unusual afternoon at the bottom of the garden belonging to Richard and Owen in one of the remoter parts of West Wickham. Not having too many neighbours was probably wise as in the mini-concert hall were no fewer than three pipe organs and other instruments of varying size, complexity and volume.

After threading our way through a well-kept garden complete with model railway (based on a narrow gauge system on the Isle of Man), we found ourselves in a building lit by Art Deco chandeliers, originally to be found in cinemas in Tonbridge and Hythe, and a clock from a Woking cinema, along with other signs and decorations from a previous age.

In pride of place was a three-keyboard Wurlitzer organ (*pictured right*) which had originally been made in 1937 for the Ritz in Barnsley.

However, it was not alone. Other instruments included an original 1912 Aeolian Pianola. This, unlike later player-pianos, was connected to a separate piano only by “fingers” which struck the piano keys as directed by the pre-punched instructions to the foot pumped bellows. Two Belgian-made instruments — one a street organ, the other connected to a piano-accordion, — were also demonstrated, the latter being a relatively modern machine using digital instructions.

Richard then played an Aeolian Pipe Organ originally installed in Scotland for Mr Dyson Perrins, grandson of the founder of the famous Worcester sauce manufacturer. After demonstrating his considerable skill on the Wurlitzer, which was powered by a six horsepower blower, Richard concluded our afternoon with automatic roll players — one by Wurlitzer and the other by Moller — which were particularly notable because the punched paper operating them had been recorded by famous organists of nearly 100 years ago and reflected their actual performance, phrasing and musicality.

We finally left somewhat later than planned after enjoying the music, interspersed with light-hearted anecdotes which clearly reflected Richard’s wide experience of rebuilding and playing organs, including at St Paul’s in London and in the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool.

Our thanks to John Barnes for arranging the visit. **MB**



Biggin Hill museum and the RAF Chapel

Our July trip to Biggin Hill Chapel and Biggin Hill museum was a visit of two contrasting, but linked, halves. The two buildings sit side-by-side and as you enter the complex the Gate Guardians — a WWII Spitfire and a Hurricane, now both fibreglass replicas so they will last longer — are there to greet you .

First we visited the Memorial Chapel, which commemorates those who died serving their country. Margaret Wilmot, the Chapel verger, was our guide. She told us that all RAF bases had a place of worship but the original chapel at Biggin Hill was peripatetic, using whatever building was available. In 1943, to commemorate the fact that Biggin Hill was the first airfield to shoot down 1,000 enemy fighters and to honour those Biggin Hill airmen who lost their lives, a Memorial Chapel was built.

Three wooden huts were pushed together, creating a space about the same size as the present Chapel. As today, two-thirds of the space was a Chapel and one-third a social area for relaxing.

Inside, it was totally plain, but on either side of a wooden altar were two wooden



boards with the names of those who lost their lives in active combat from Group 11, which was Biggin Hill and all its satellite stations down to, and along the coast in Kent and Sussex. Unfortunately, in December 1946 the Chapel was totally

destroyed in an accidental fire, but when fundraising began for a new Chapel donations poured in and by September 1951 the present Chapel was dedicated.

While the building itself is still simple, reflecting the original Chapel, inside the décor has become enriched over the years by donations, often from Commonwealth countries, whose airmen had served in Group 11.

As can be seen in the picture above, the flags of the those countries stand either side of the altar. The altar furniture came from the Royal Australian Air Force and was designed to reflect the font which had been made by Rev Vivian Symmonds of St Mark's, Biggin Hill. Everything, Margaret said, "had been donated by a group or a family or an individual, with a memory attached to it".

There are also stained-glass windows such as that to St George pictured on our front cover. Seven of the windows commemorate the squadrons which flew out of Biggin Hill.

The wooden boards were remade after the fire, as was the daily book of remembrance. The airmen's names are now grouped under their squadrons with the names at the top of the battles that Group 11 took part in.

Our final stop on this part of the tour was the Garden of Remembrance — consecrated ground planted with yellow roses. Here the ashes of those who served in the RAF, and their spouses, are still being interred today.

Biggin Hill Museum

The second part of our visit was to the museum, which reflects a very different history of Biggin Hill. A small display tells the history of the airfield from its beginnings in 1917 and John Preedy (whose wife Pam, a BBLHS committee member, arranged the Society visit) showed us some of the artefacts from that era.

But most of the material is about the base itself and those – both military and civilian – whose were caught up in it during the war. People such as Bill, who ran the Nightingale Café which found itself “behind the wire” when war broke out and whose customers became the airmen and ground crew. The current museum café bears the same name and is decorated in homage to its namesake.

Then there were the children from Biggin Hill, including Geoff Greensmith, whose father ran the café and who had unique access to the airfield. His family pictures and memories are part of the museum display as are those of other civilian families and the tales of village life just outside “the wire”.

The work of “The Many” — the WAAFs, Women's Auxiliary Air Force members – so crucial to keeping the key backroom services running, and that of the ground crews are all recorded in exhibits and display boards alongside the history of The Few”.

It is a small museum but one that brings to life what living and working at Biggin Hill must have been like during the war. For those who were unable to come in July, I thoroughly recommend a visit —including, of course, a cup of tea at the Nightingale Café! **CH**



The Biggin Hill scramble bell, with other museum exhibits in view behind

Orpington's quiet philanthropist

Alfred Brown was a wealthy, highly-respected resident of Orpington for 40 years, one of its principal land and property owners and a generous supporter of numerous causes in the town and further afield. But he is barely remembered today in the place he loved. Except, perhaps, for his great gift to Orpington in 1890 – the Village Hall that stood in the High Street until it was demolished in 1968 and replaced by the modern one now sited by the war memorial, still governed by his trust deed.

Intrigued by the dearth of recorded detail about Alfred, Patrick Hellicar researched his origins, his life, his giving and the source of his wealth. He shared his findings with BBLHS earlier this year in a fascinating talk entitled *The Mysterious Mr Brown, Orpington's Quiet Philanthropist*.

Alfred was a Suffolk lad, born in 1830 in a tiny village to a tailor, who later became a schoolmaster, and his wife. The third of eight children, Alfred left home at the age of 14 to work for Charles Meeking, a large London draper in Holborn, living-in alongside a crowd of other young employees at a warehouse/lodging house the firm owned.

By 1861 he was married to Elizabeth, a former servant girl from Lincolnshire, had two sons and was manager of the firm's woollen drapery arm. But they were still living at the lodging house with other Meeking employees, Elizabeth in charge as housekeeper.

Meeking's shop and some of his other properties were compulsorily-purchased by the City Corporation for the building of Holborn Viaduct in the mid-late 1860s. But this gave him the opportunity to re-establish his business in a massive new store which he-built on the newly-created Holborn Circus.

When Meeking died in 1872, the business was handed to Alfred Brown and four other long-serving employees. This made Alfred a wealthy man. He then brought his family to Orpington, where he had a large house built, set in five and a half acres at the foot of what is now Knoll Rise, and soon acquired other land and properties. However, he never became involved in local politics or municipal life.

Sadly, Elizabeth died in 1879 at the age of 46 and was laid to rest in the churchyard at All Saints. Alfred paid for the lych-gate at All Saints' to be erected in her memory. In later years, All Saints received other large donations from him.

Over the following two decades Alfred left the Meeking partnership, hived off its woollen drapery side into a separate business at Holborn with his two sons and increased his footprint in Orpington. As well as houses and cottages – many let at very low rents to elderly tenants – he snapped up dozens of acres along the road towards Green Street Green and in 1889 acquired "The Boundary" (between the railway line and Warren Road).

This “desirable freehold residence” with a bailiff’s cottage, numerous outbuildings, large gardens and meadowland totalling just over two acres, plus another acre or so of excellent arable land, became Alfred’s home. After his death the estate was sold and it was here that, in the First World War, the Canadians built the Ontario military hospital which eventually became Orpington Hospital.

A project Alfred was especially keen on was a plan in the mid-1890s by the Linen and Woollen Drapers Institution to build an estate of cottage homes for retired workers from the trade. He offered some of his “Boundary” land but a site at Mill Hill near Hendon was chosen instead. Alfred then funded the construction of two of the cottages and endowed them with a supply of coal in perpetuity for their tenants.

He was always a generous benefactor to Chislehurst Road School and Wellington Road School in Orpington but the true extent of his munificence will never be known because he preferred to “do good by stealth”, making many donations anonymously.

In 1910, Alfred Brown & Sons moved from Holborn to St Martin’s Lane on the edge of Covent Garden after buying up the business of James Platt, a huge rival which had gone bust. Alfred’s elder son, Charles, had quit the family business earlier to pursue his career in the Auxiliary Army, rising to Colonel – so the partnership at this stage consisted only of Alfred, now aged 81, and his younger son, Robert, who masterminded the takeover and developed the business further.

Alfred died in 1915 and was buried at All Saints with his wife and son Charles, who had passed away in 1911. Among his legacies he left £5,000 to be distributed to chosen employees, £5,000 to the Drapers Cottage Homes at Hendon and other sums to The Drapers’ Schools at Purley; Dr Barnardo’s, The Homes for Little Boys at Swanley and Farningham, The Reedham Orphanage at Purley and the Church Army.

One obituary declared: “It may be truly said that Mr Alfred Brown lived a long, helpful and beneficent life, revered and honoured by all who knew him.”

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**

The cemeteries of South London

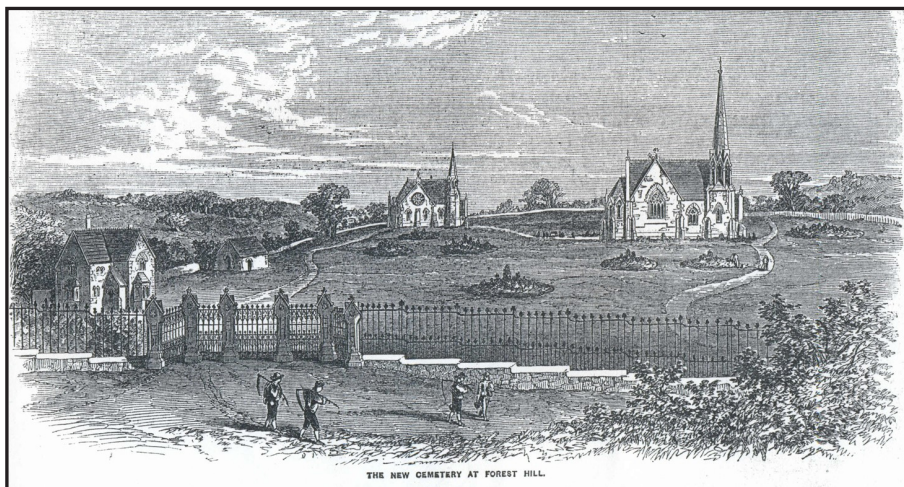
London has an inordinate number of cemeteries stretching back to the early 19th century, when the churchyards of the city became full to overflowing.

First came the “magnificent seven” in the 1830s, the best known of which is Highgate and two of which are in South London — West Norwood and Nunhead. Then followed waves of cemetery-building, both private and municipal, and as Brian Parsons set out in his in June talk, *The Cemeteries of South London*, these green spaces that were once on the outskirts of the city are now quiet oases in the metropolis.

The “magnificent seven” were opened by joint-stock companies and, said Brian, “severed the church of England’s monopoly on cemetery provision”. West Norwood — where Sir Henry Doulton of the ceramics company and Sir Henry Tate of Tate & Lyle are buried — and Nunhead were both extremely prestigious in their hey-day with beautifully-designed chapels with catacombs beneath.

Twenty years later, local burials boards were legally able to establish cemeteries and charge for grave space and permit memorials. Most had two chapels — one Anglican and the other for everyone else — with the buildings often joined by an entrance gate. They were “a great success, providing local and less-expensive burial space”.

Throughout his talk Brian showed us slides of numerous cemeteries. An example of a local board one was Camberwell New Cemetery, opened in 1856, and Greenwich, Plumstead and Woolwich. They had beautiful views and grand buildings and



The New Cemetery at Forest Hill, set like most C19th cemeteries in a beautiful landscape

memorials around the chapels, gothic lodges, avenues of trees and vistas and planting with a variety of trees and landscaping.

By the 1890s “once again cemetery space was not finite and burial space was needed”. The “spirit of cemetery planning” continued” with Inner London Authorities opening cemeteries outside their borough boundaries. Battersea found 80 acres at Waddon near Croydon. New industry sprang up around the cemeteries, monumental masons, such as T Candy at Beckenham, most using standardised designs from catalogues.

Cremation began in 1885 and took off very slowly, but by 1967 cremations began to exceed burials. In the 1950s the Crystal Palace District Cemetery – known now as Beckenham Cemetery – converted a chapel to a crematorium.

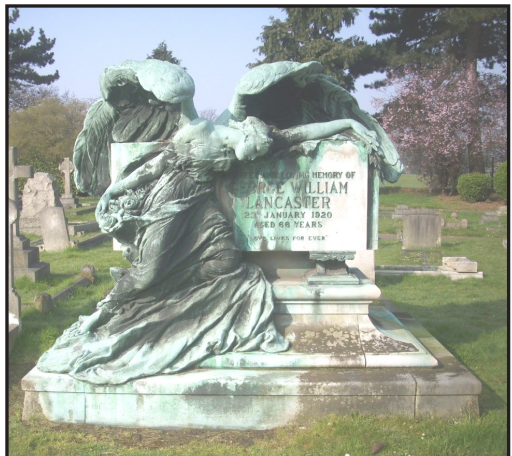
That decade also saw the decline in cemetery maintenance and they became overgrown, vandalised and home to vagrants. Parts of Nunhead and West Norwood cemeteries were destroyed until councils, which now had charge of the cemeteries, were taken to court to stop the destruction. “Everywhere, chapels have been demolished and monuments toppled and vandalised ... even clearance of monuments [has been carried out] by local authorities,” said Brian.

But out of that low point came a renaissance: “The last four decades have seen cemeteries re-discovered as environment, art, architecture, local heritage and flora and fauna. Much can be attributed to the Friends groups.”

Brian ended by showing some of the most interesting and quirky monuments – one in the shape of a tent, several lions, a dolphin, cars, a piano, a bench and “greyhounds keeping watch for their master”, small temples and innumerable angels and “the most spectacular bronze in any London cemetery” (*pictured below*) in Richmond . The memorial is by Sydney March and was made at the family workshops at Locksbottom in Farnborough.

This was a geographically wide-ranging talk which, it turned out, took in many of the cemeteries where members of the audience had family graves, and gave us plenty to look for next time we explore one of these sad by tranquil spots in our busy city. **CH**

Brian Parsons and Hugh Mellor have written three books on the cemeteries of London, see www.brianparsons.org.uk



All the fun of Pettigrove's funfair

The following request came via the BBLHS website: "I wondered if you have any information or photographs of the Pettigrove family? They were showmen and had a yard in Lower Road [Orpington] where they stayed in the winter with all the fair equipment." — Christina Ward

Christina is the great-great-granddaughter of Isabella Pettigrove, pictured left. She remembers some family conversations but would like to know more about her showmen ancestors. "I would love to be able to complete as much of the family history as I can to leave for my sons and their children. Our heritage is important."

Dorothy Cox's *Book of Orpington* includes some information. She says the annual autumn fair (late 19th century) was held in the White Hart Meadow (behind the pub which still exists at the top of Orpington High Street). "Stalls were erected and swing boats, a scenic railway and pony-driven roundabouts were provided by the Pettigrove Fair. Rides cost 1d and 2d. The ponies were later replaced by a steam traction engine which then supplied all the power for the rides."

William and Isabella Pettigrove arrived in Orpington from Hatton Garden, London, in the 19th century and their funfairs travelled the length and breadth of the country. Their winter headquarters were on the site of today's Carlton Parade at the northern end of Orpington High Street at the junction of Lower Road. This area was developed after the A224 Orpington By-pass was built in 1926.

From the 1920s to 1960s Granny Pettigrove's funfair was based at Heathfield Road, Keston. There were cottages and a smithy that became the entrance to the funfair. The site then became a caravan park and was later developed into Windmill Drive. There are several pictures of the site in Ted Williams's book *Keston Parish: More Pictures from the Past*.

If anyone has more information on the Pettigrove family Christina can be contacted at chris-ward1965@hotmail.com



Murder at Bromley Hill House — fact and fantasy

In his article on Bromley Hill House in the June 2022 edition of *Bromleag*, Michael Rawcliffe set out the history of the house and its illustrious owners from its purchase by Charles Long in 1801 right up to its present incarnation as a hotel.

Long, later to become Lord Farnborough, was an MP, a friend of Prime Minister William Pitt and an art collector. He was living at Bromley Hill House as early as 1795, probably as a lessee. According to *Horsburgh*, Long proposed buying the property in 1796.

That summer a rather darker side to the house's history occurred — a murder that was to gain considerable publicity nationwide. Later, a catchpenny eight-page pamphlet, *The Genuine Life and Love Adventurers of John Clarke, including the particulars of his Behaviour at the Place of Execution etc*, detailing the circumstances of the murder, was published. Catchpennies were street literature. Cheap, mass-produced sheets sold by hawkers, they were the forerunners of the popular press and were both salacious and moralistic.

According to *The Genuine Life*, John Clarke, a “handsome, powerful man of 29, with a pleasant manner”, had told his employers he was single — which he was not. He then courted the dairymaid Elizabeth Mann and “got her with child”. Alarmed that his wife might hear, he cut her throat in the dairy and strangled her with a rope.

It continued: “From age of fifteen Clarke had displayed the greatest propensity to the company of females ... many a blooming fair fell a sacrifice to the gratification of that passion which at last cost him his life.”

The pamphlet traced the history of his “romances” before and after his marriage, saying he got many a girl in the “family way”. It even claimed that he once escaped without suspicion when a fellow servant-woman who was with child was found murdered. He moved around a great deal then married and settled in London but continued his “womanising” so he had to move on again and eventually came to Bromley.

How much of this is true or embellishment of the truth would be hard to verify today but newspaper reports of the trial, including those in the *Kentish Gazette*, are a less-sensational but more reliable source.

Clarke was committed for trial on 19 July at Maidstone Assizes, just days after the murder. The trial was two days later and after the evidence was heard he confessed, saying that after an argument he got in “a violent passion”, strangled Elizabeth and then cut her throat to ensure she was dead. He is reported as saying: “I had no intention of doing the deceased any injury till the moment I committed the deed,

and did not murder her for the sake of preserving my character.”

Witnesses had told the court that a few days before she was murdered Elizabeth appeared dejected because Clarke was not paying her the attention to which she was accustomed. She disappeared on the Monday and the following day was found by the steward and coachman in the dairy, with a deep wound in her throat and a cord fastened tight round her neck.

The newspaper reports continue: “From the intimacy which subsisted between the prisoner and her, their suspicions fell on him.” Two officers from Bow Street were sent for, they went to the dairy, where, after a strict search, found nothing that would suggest suicide. They immediately took Clarke into custody.

At first he denied knowing anything about the murder but when he gave an alibi he contradicted himself several times. Evidence about his movements was given by a lodger and a piece of rope was produced which had been found in the tool-house of the prisoner. This was the same local manufacture, texture and size as that found about Elizabeth’s neck. Clarke was sentenced to death and the execution was carried out two days later.

The various nationwide newspaper reports — all very similar as they would have been provided by a news agency — comment that everyone was astonished at the unparalleled firmness Clarke displayed throughout the trial and his execution.

They also carry his confession to the clergyman shortly before his execution, which was then given to the Secretary of State’s office (*Reading Mercury*) in which he said that when he attempted to leave her she “begged him to murder her rather than to leave her in that dreadful state of mind”.

At the execution tree, which stood on Bromley Hill near to the site of the murder, he prayed earnestly with the clergyman. Then, according to the *Genuine Life*, he asked to address the crowd which had come to see him hang.

“Good Christians, and you young men in particular, you see before you the fatal effects of the indulgence of unlawful passions ... avoid above every sin, that of lust ... had I been contented and happy in the chaste embraces of a faithful wife, I never should have come to this untimely end.”

There is much more in this vein, giving the leaflet a high moral ending.

In his *History of Bromley*, Horsbrugh tells us that Clarke was hanged on Bromley Hill, adding that “it was not unusual for the extreme penalty to be exacted as near as possible to the scene of the crime”.

As was the practice of the time, the body of John Clarke, was dissected for medical research. Elizabeth Mann was buried at Bromley.

Christine Hellicar

Hayes WWII bomb — another honour

The March 2021 edition of *Bromleag*, told of the award of George Medals to an ARP rescue party – Owen Parsloe and Walter Field — for their bravery in rescuing a young boy named David Stoner when a bomb demolished his home in Hayes in 1940.

Now further details have emerged, based on a collection of family records of another local hero, Donald Carlill, Superintendent of the Bromley Stretcher Party Depot, SP3, based at “Gadsden” in Hayes. He was also involved in the rescue.

A newspaper article of 4 October 1941 refers to the second anniversary of SP3 when about 60 people attended a supper party at the headquarters in “Gadsden”. This event was hosted by Donald Carlill, *pictured right*, superintendent of depot SP3. An important guest was Dr KE Tapper, Bromley’s Medical Officer of Health and head of the borough’s ARP Casualty Service, himself a recipient of a George Medal.



In his reply to the host’s welcome, Dr Tapper made mention of the King’s commendation of Mr Carlill “for the part he played in rescuing and attending air raid casualties”.

SP3 had arrived soon after a bomb caused severe blast damage to the semi-detached house at 216/218 Hayes Lane during the night of 26 October 1940, home of the Stoner family. Donald Carlill heard voices from within the wreckage and set about tunnelling through the structural debris of the collapsed first floor – timbers, masonry, furnishings, etc. Eventually, in spite of imminent danger to his safety, he was able to reach and stay with four year-old David Stoner and to comfort him throughout as he was trapped and initially could not be freed. Later, as reported in *Bromleag*, the rescue party led by Owen Parsloe with Walter Field were able to use their equipment to reach David and help free him.

After the event the Stoner family moved to Cambridge from where Mr CR Stoner [Senior] was in correspondence with Mr Carlill [2 November 1940] saying how proud he was of SP3 and regretted being unable to make his grateful thanks in person. Mr Stoner had at one time also been a member of SP3 at “Gadsden” and wished to be remembered to his colleagues.

On 8 February 1941 the *Bromley & West Kent Mercury* noted the award of the George Medal to the rescuers for their “bravery in recovering casualties from a bombed house in Hayes Lane”. It also mentioned that Mr Carlill had “been

commended for his gallantry and devotion to duty” at the same incident. The King’s commendation to Mr Carlill for “brave conduct in Civil Defence” dated 21 February 1941 was signed by Winston Churchill. The *Mercury* went on to give details of Parsloe and Field’s actions (see *Bromleag* March 2021 page 34)

The report continued: “On a particularly dark night, he [Mr Carlill] was one of a party who rescued two children and a woman [Mrs Stoner] from the ruins of a house where three lives had been lost. To reach the children the rescuers had to crawl under a floor. A child’s nose was buried in the ceiling. By cutting out the springs of a bed Mr Carlill managed to lower the child to comparative safety, and so save a life. It was an extremely delicate task done successfully under conditions of great difficulty and danger.”

A similar contemporaneous article in the *Kentish Times* also referred to the King’s commendation. Mr Carlill told the newspaper: “They were the coolest family I have ever met.” Characteristically, he preferred to say nothing of his own part in the incident beyond expressing satisfaction that their lives had been saved.

Following the publicity of the award of the George medal and commendation there were numerous congratulatory messages to Mr Carlill and Mr Stoner senior sent him an illuminated Bible “as a token of our esteem” – a much-appreciated gift and memento.

The homes were rebuilt and up until recent times, though not currently, the adult David Stoner lived there with his wife.

In 1990 when, at auction, Bromley Council bought the George Medal awarded to Mr Parsloe, David Stoner was reported in the *Kentish Times* as saying: “I was in bed at the time when I woke up suddenly and found there was a heavy weight on top of me ... I shouted to my mother and heard her answer but she was buried further away.” Mrs Stoner, David and his brother were all safely rescued. Sadly, David’s sister and an elderly man were killed in the explosion.

Sources The War Office, 18 February 1941 – Oak Leaf Emblem award;
Borough of Bromley, Medical officer of Health [Dr K Tapper] – 18 February 1941;
Ministry of Home Security Inter-departmental Committee on Civil Defence Gallantry Awards
HQ London Civil Defence Region – 20 February 1941;
Borough of Bromley, Borough Engineer – 21 February 1942;
Bromley Stretcher Party No 4 – 22 February 1941;
Borough of Bromley, Controller of Civil Defence – 22 February 1941;
Bromley Stretcher Party Depot No. 1 – 24th February 1941;
Mayor’s Parlour, Bromley – 5 March 1941;
CR Stoner, letter to DH Carlill – 23 March 1941;
Borough of Bromley for Wartime Civil Defence Services – August 1945.

Discovery of long lost Beckenham Cator Estate map

Mal Mitchell

Well, the map was not exactly lost but in hiding on the wall of a property management office. The owner had acquired the 1864 map along with all the ephemera of a business that he took over. It went with him to new premises and adorned his office wall. A couple of years in storage in his garage and a house move prompted him to find a new home for it and he contacted BBLHS to see if anyone was interested.¹

Knowing that Keith Baldwin and I are researching Beckenham history, Max Batten put me in contact with the owner, Richard Mason, and he has lent it to me for more in-depth research.

The Cator Estate maps held in Bromley Historic Collections — where the 1864 map may go eventually — are dated 1833 and 1889. The latter is an updated version of the 1864 map but it is in a very poor condition and needs conservation work. There is also



Part of the 1864 map, showing Beckenham Place, top left, Chancery Lane triangle, bottom left, Bromley Road to Shortlands and the railway to Shortlands Station

Comments and queries

an 1893 map in the museum collection.

The 1864 map shows signs of having been kept in storage with documents prior to being framed, which has probably conserved it.

The map extends to Crystal Palace Park, which opened in 1856, and shows the lake and fountains there. Part of the park had originally been part of Beckenham Manor from well before 1623. We can also see that in 1864 the area of Kent House Farm is still farmland with some roads planned but unnamed — Lennard Road and Kings Hall Road, for example.

What else does the map tell us? Visually it is easier to understand changes and development of this area of Beckenham from the map than piece together information from deeds etc, where they exist. Unfortunately, although the legend on the map indicates colours which would identify various leases such as Copers Cope Farm and Beckenham Place, this map is a draft or contemporary copy in black and white.

Various planned roads are shown which did not exist in 1833, including Copers Cope Road, The Avenue (previously called Mote Road) a road extending Downs Hill into Beckenham Place, Summerhouse Wood and Albemarle Road.

Having maps from 1833, 1864 and 1889 helps to identify more precisely how the area developed. One road appearing on the later 1889 map, which was not planned in 1864 is the Beckenham Place Park private road. Kings Hall Road does not exist on the 1864 map but is in place on the 1889 edition.

New Beckenham Station began life adjacent to what is now Bridge Road but was moved to be at the end of Lennard Road with originally a level crossing there which was removed after the later construction of Bridge Road.

John Cator began acquiring Beckenham property from about 1758 from the manor of Foxgrove. He built his house at Stumps Hill between 1760 and 1762. There were exchanges of land with the Raymonds of Langley in 1759 and he purchased the Manor of Beckenham in 1773. Further exchanges took place with the Burrells of Kelsey and Langley in 1777 and 1793. The Cator Estate was then mainly to the north of Beckenham, extending from Penge to Bromley and Lewisham.²

In the 1830s John Cator's nephew and heir, John Barwell Cator, acquired Kent House and Farm. Other acquisitions, including Thayers Farm, made the estate fairly contiguous but it was still mainly farms and leased messuages or homesteads.

Thayers Farm was acquired by the first Albemarle Cator in 1837 from a group of trustees, among them members of the Forster family. It was then joined with Clockhouse Farm although the 1838 tithe map and data show different occupants.

Now, with the new map we can see how phases of "New Beckenham" development began as well as other parts of the Cator Estate extending to Penge

and Sydenham. One road that would have extended Lawn Road across the old CUACO and Lloyds sports grounds did not get laid down, but now 21st century development is creeping over the hitherto open space Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). The original Victorian villas on large plots have in most cases disappeared to make way for smaller houses or blocks of flats.

On the 1833 map we can see Shortlands House but not on the 1864 map. By then John Barwell Cator had sold both of them. Shortlands House is on the site of what was Woolseys Farm in 1735 and today is the site of Bishop Challoner School.

The date of the map may be in anticipation of Albemarle's death, which occurred just four years later in 1868.³ His father, John Barwell Cator, had died in 1858 — substantially after the 1833 map.

- 1 Richard Mason of Keston and Broadstairs who had an office in the old school house in Keston prior to it becoming apartments. The map adorned the wall of his office there, having moved with him from his old office in Elmers End.
- 2 The establishment of the Cator Estate is covered in detail in *A History of Beckenham* viewable on the BBLHS website. It is regularly updated
- 3 Bromley Historic Collections holds a report on the condition of the estate in 1868 describing building leases, farm leases, rents etc.

If anyone would like more information on the map, Mal can be contacted at malvinmitchell@hotmail.com

What was West Wickham's link to Co. Durham?

My name is Paul Robson and I am a local historian based in County Durham. During my research I came across a link between my own area and West Wickham during the 1930s.

The wife of the headmaster of one of our local schools at Chilton Moor, Fence Houses, a Mrs F Nelson, had a brother, Mr E L Hawkins, who resided at West Wickham. He had connections with a Sir John Jarvis and through this connection a church at West Wickham generously "adopted" the school and sent many gifts and donations to them.

I would be very interested to know if anyone knows of this connection. If you are interested, I can send you the information I've got, mainly from newspaper articles.

I have a local history website: sites.google.com/site/allthingsbournmoor/burnmoor

Paul can be contacted through his website

Neelgherries and the gift of Bromley Library Gardens

Max Batten

Recent controversy over plans to rebuild the west side of Bromley Broadway and impinge upon the Library Gardens makes it opportune to look again at the creation of this green space in central Bromley.

The gardens and the land occupied by the Churchill Theatre and Central Library were donated by Mrs Emily Dowling, née Carpenter, when she died of Bright's Disease aged 81 on 23 March 1900.

It was part of a long list of bequests to the town made possible by the successful career of her first husband, George Sparkes, who had worked for some years as a judge for the East India Company in Madras (now Chennai).

The eldest of the six children of George and Anne Sparkes (née Wiple), George was born in Marylebone in 1810. He went to a school in Bromley set up by the Rev John Baker on what is now the west side of the start of The Broadway. He was later educated at Eton.

George arrived in India in 1834 but finally left in 1846 and returned to Bromley. He was a great-grandson of John Cator of Beckenham Place Park and may well have worked with his relative Peter Cator, who was a barrister in Madras at the same time.

As was not uncommon with people who served in India, his health on his return to England was poor and he was somewhat reclusive. He had an extensive interest in botany and wrote a book on chemistry as well as amassing a collection of rare coins. He served on the Bromley



The front of Neelgherries facing the High Street

Parish Church Vestry (at least in 1872) but generally his name cropped up only as a contributor to local good causes. He stated during his lifetime that he wanted to leave his property to the town to be used as a museum and pleasure ground. In the event, this had to wait as on his death he left everything to his wife.

The 1841 census shows George Spark(e)s aged 30 living in the High Street, of independent means and (incorrectly) as born in Kent. Since he was supposed to be in India at this time, we can perhaps assume he was home on leave. The census entries immediately above George's (no house number is given so it is not certain it is the same household) includes Emily Carpenter, born in Bromley in 1819, two older twin sisters, Catherine and Maria, and a 25 year-old brother, James, who was an upholsterer. They were the children of gamekeeper William and his wife Sarah Carpenter.

The following entry in the 1841 census is for Bromley School so it is likely that the women were working in the school and George was lodging in his *alma mater*.

The 1851 census shows him (recorded as age 41) living in or near Bromley High Street along with two servants, Emily Carpenter, 32, and Sarah Carpenter, 23 (born 8 August 1827). George's occupation is shown as Director of the Reversionary (*sic*) Society*. Emily's sister Maria had married in 1850 but what had happened to Catherine and James is not clear.

Ten years later the same names appear with ages 51, 42 and 32 respectively. It appears George and Emily got married a year later in September 1862 in Dover. Why they went so far away is not known, but possibly their different status, and age, made a more discreet ceremony easier all round. It appears he appreciated her wit and intelligence and made sure she was educated to be his equal during their marriage.

Although his health may have failed him, financially he appears to have done well from his time abroad and in the late 1850s (his name first appears in the *Bromley Record* in 1860) he purchased No 16 High Street, the former Bromley School at which he lodged. Allegedly, he then renamed the property "Neelgherries", an alternative spelling of the name of the place where he had spent the uncomfortable summer months in India, and which it is said offered similar views to those from his Bromley house.

The area today is called Nilgiris, in Tamu Nadu, nearly 300 miles from Madras and nearly 6,000 feet above sea level. Since first being explored by Europeans around 1820, its average summer temperature of around 70 degrees Fahrenheit had made it very popular both with settlers and summer visitors.

The 1871 census shows George, age 61, and Emily Spark(e)s, 52. He is recorded as being retired from the Madras Civil Service. They had one domestic servant but Sarah has now disappeared from the scene. The pair seemed to have been active in the

Feature

Bromley community, in particular making financial contributions to local organisations.

When George died on the 30 January 1878, he left Emily £140,000. Apparently, having seen little of the world compared with her late husband, she decided to go on an extended tour of Europe, for which she engaged Irish-born Dennis John Dowling (1848-1920) as a courier. Clearly his talents were not restricted to guiding as, a year later in Eastbourne, Emily married Dennis, a man nearly 30 years her junior.

Their relationship did not prosper as he is later recorded living in Folkestone and she as a visitor there. Clearly, she hung on to the money, for although well known for her charitable works, including paying for a new oak case for the Parish Church organ in 1894, she still left nearly £90,000 when she died in 1900. Her will ran to 120-pages. The most important item to us was a bequest to Bromley Urban District Council gifting her house and estate in trust for the benefit of the inhabitants of the town. She also left £1,000 and the proceeds from the sale of furniture and jewellery to establish the Emily Dowling Fund for the support of the building and grounds.

In addition to the long list of bequests to hospitals and animal charities, money was left for the maintenance of a memorial fountain on Chelsea Embankment, near the junction with Old Church Street. This (*pictured above*) was erected in 1880 but why at this location is unclear.

Emily had earlier proposed one on Masons Hill in Bromley and although this was rejected by the Metropolitan Drinking Fountain Association, it was nevertheless installed in 1898. They apparently approved of the Chelsea fountain plan as she left them £1,000 for its maintenance, but when it had to be restored in 2016 it was paid for by Transport for London and the local council.

Dennis Dowling remarried in 1901 and died in Hastings in relative poverty. On condition that he kept away from Bromley, Emily had left him an income which enabled him to describe himself at the time as a “gentleman”. This would distinguish him from his timber merchant father and builder father-in-law. He did, however,



attend Emily's funeral. He also got his name remembered, rather than that of George Sparkes, as it is Emily Dowling and not Emily Sparkes who is recorded as the town's benefactor.

Other bequests from Emily included money to Sarah, now Mrs Griffiths, as well sisters Elizabeth Bevins and Fanny Coleman together with other family members.

One more bequest of interest in Emily's will was a gift of £5,000 to George's nephew Prince Tigreine D'Abio Pasha. Since George was described as a widower at the time of their marriage, is it possible that he married in India and this was a relation of his wife's? No mention was made of this relationship nor comment made on the bequest.

There was much subsequent comment and discussion, of course, about how the bequest to the town should be implemented. The creation of a Trust, various court actions and the involvement of the Town Council, Kent County Council and the Board of Education meant that matters rumbled on until 1911. Various plans, not only for a library but also other educational and recreational activities, were considered, including a swimming pool. This may be the source of the rumours over many years of a secret pool beneath the New Theatre (destroyed by fire in May 1971).

The name "Neelgherries" does not appear during George's lifetime — indeed, not until around 1890 — but it was a substantial three-storey house behind an ornate iron gate. A large wing was added by Emily, but the property was quite shallow and not as large as it appeared to be from the front. The ground floor had a dining room and library with two drawing rooms on the first floor, lit from both front and back. The extension included a morning room and smoking room as well as a fine staircase leading to the garden, largely devoted to shrubs and trees.

The building was demolished within a couple of years of Emily's death and eventually the new library was built (with £7,500 from Andrew Carnegie) on the site. The public garden laid out by James Stenning, the Superintendent of recreation grounds, was completed and made available to the public in June 1906. It was then 230 yards long by around 35 yards wide and entered by the iron gates. The following year it was decided to sell these but although it was suggested they be reused as an entrance to a recreation ground, it is not known what happened to them.

The flowers at the front of the library, which you passed on the way to the new public garden, were much admired. The reviewer of the new garden itself in the July *Bromley Record* waxed lyrical about its beauty and the "umbrageous luxuriance of the surroundings" which consisted of beech, birch and chestnut trees on the sides and elms at the end. There were two summer houses amid the many flower beds served by a winding path. Despite a number of changes over the years, it has continued to provide a calm oasis adjacent to a busy High Street.

* There were several Reversionary Societies, the first in 1823. They were similar to the modern concept of equity release.

Beckenham's war memorial and the Cottage Hospital

Linda Baldwin

From time to time I have heard the rumour that Beckenham Hospital had “taken” funds destined for the town’s War Memorial. In the *Beckenham Cottage Hospital Board of Management Minute Books* is filed the transcript of a letter dated August 1919 that led to two memorials being built.

In August 1919 the following letter was written by H S Ashton (1862-1947)¹ of “The Whitmore’s”, Kelsey Park, from his London address shortly before his move to Ingatestone, Essex. It was addressed to Dr Henry Randall.²

“I formed the resolution at the time of the Armistice [November 1918] of subscribing £1,000 to the War Memorial which I anticipated then Beckenham would desire to set up in some form or other with generosity and enthusiasm.

“Personally, I had hoped that the Memorial would take a shape that would lead to the extension of the Hospital accommodation in the town. Not only, however, is there no sign of this happening, but nothing has yet materialised in regard to any Memorial, so that on the eve of my departure from Beckenham, nine months after the Armistice, I feel, so far as this matter goes, rather depressed. I should like to have acted in co-operation with my fellow citizens rather than alone, but it looks to me as though the generality of the people do not realise the horrors from which they have been protected, and are not too ready with gifts of work and money to show that they are thankful.

“Therefore, driven first by these delays, and then by these doubts from acting, as I think good citizens should, in co-operation, I have decided to do so independently.

“I have given £500 to the Society for Befriending Women and Girls [an early organisation to protect working-class country girls who left home to take up urban employment] and I have now pleasure in enclosing a cheque for £500 [about £32,500 in 2022 money], which I should be grateful [*sic*] if you would make over to the Committee for the Cottage Hospital. I do not make any stipulation as to how the money should be used, but only desire that it may be remembered that I gave it in thankfulness that the principles for which this country fought were upheld successfully and that its shores remained inviolate.

“You may wonder why I address this to you thus. Firstly, you are a personal

friend, secondly you are the chief citizen of the town, and thirdly you took a large part in the Red Cross work so admirably carried on during the war in Beckenham.

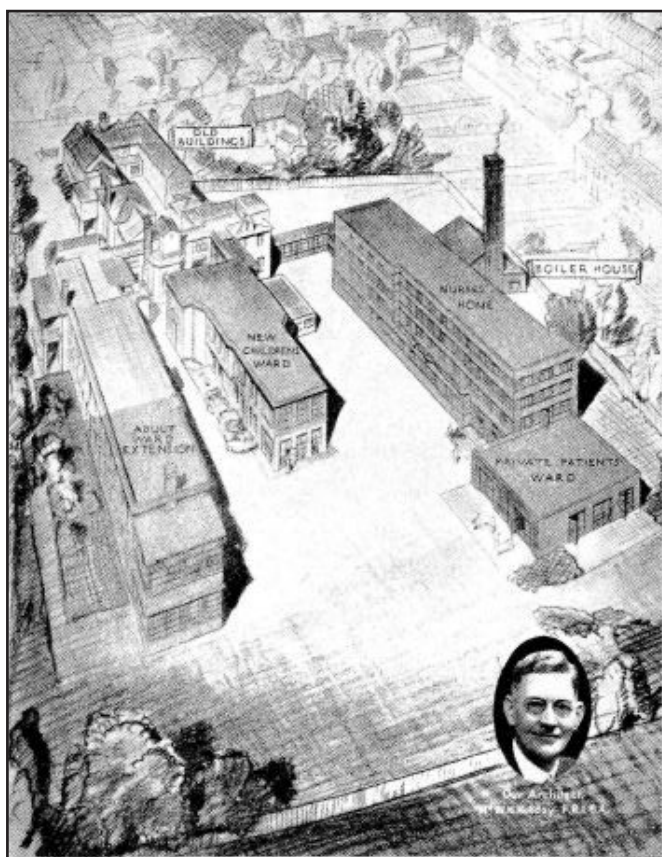
"I write this letter, as I earmark my gift to hospital work largely in compliment to you and other ladies and gentlemen who made the two VAD hospitals here, as I have been told on very good authority more than once, the best in Kent.

It is hardly for me to suggest that our hospitals should not be municipalised, but I may at least note as a singular thing that the one great organisation of the war which was run largely by voluntary effort was the one which most escaped the pigeon-holing of human souls and bodies, as though they were so many packets of inanimate merchandise. I hope, therefore, that if after all Beckenham

does organise a Memorial, it may be in connection with her hospital, which calls so loudly for extension, and that you may be found acting in the matter rather as a man and physician than as chairman of the District Council.

Yours sincerely,
H S Ashton"

After the letter was read out at the August meeting of the Hospital Management Committee and the cheque passed to the treasurer, a discussion took place on the subject of a Beckenham War Memorial and "it became understood"



*Beckenham Hospital Appeals brochure 1933.
showing the original hospital and the new extensions.*

Feature

that Dr Randall would call a public meeting to consider the question. Three further donors, Mr Sherley-Price, Mr GF Hird and Mr J Byron, offered £250 each, on condition the Beckenham War Memorial took the form of the reconstruction and extension of the Cottage Hospital and provided that the hospital continued on a voluntary basis, not as part of the Beckenham Urban District Council, as was under consideration at the time.

The Beckenham War Memorial was unveiled on 24 July 1921.

The hospital committee had overseen the collection of £1,240-15s-8d (about £81,000 in 2022 money) towards the cause over three years. The renovation, modernisation and extension of the hospital took another five years to complete at a further cost of £32,000 (about £2.1 million, 2022).

These memorials to those who fought overseas and served at home during the 1914-18 war were realised through the generosity and tireless efforts of the hospital's Management Committee, donors and fundraisers and through grants from The King Edward's Hospital Fund for London, The Red Cross and the Beckenham VAD hospitals funds.

Notes

The Ministry of Pensions: From April 1919 Beckenham Hospital provided free treatment to ex-servicemen funded by the Ministry of Pensions. In the first quarter they treated 12 in-patients and provided 1,280 outpatient sessions. This ongoing increase in patient numbers drove the need to expand and modernise the 32-bed hospital.

¹**Hubert Shorrock Ashton:** In 1891 he was an "East India Merchant", then enlisted in the Indian Army. He married Victoria Alexandrina Inglis, the daughter of Major General Sir John Inglis KCB. Five of their six sons were born in Calcutta. The family returned to England, settling in Beckenham, in 1906. Their four surviving sons and two of Victoria's brothers were First-Class county and England XI cricketers (*Wisden*). Victoria's uncle, a British Army Chaplain, died at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

²**Reginald Maurice Henry Randall MD MRCS** (1884 Guy's): "Henry" was a surgeon at Beckenham Cottage Hospital for his whole career. He was Beckenham UDC Chairman 1902-1919. As MO at Balgovan VAD Hospital, he received the MBE in the 1920 civilian war honours [*Bromley & West Kent Mercury* 9 April 1920].

Source:

Beckenham Cottage Hospital Board of Management Minute Books, Bromley Historic Collections (849/MH/B1/M)

The rise and decline of Widmore Road's Bromley Congregational Church

In the 1770s a small group of Bromley residents became so disillusioned with the Anglican Church of their day that they began meeting for worship in their homes, then rented a wooden building in Isard's Yard behind Market Square. **Tudor Davies**

They invited itinerant preachers to lead their services, among them John Wesley, founder member of the Methodist Society (Fetter Lane, 1732). Having been granted a 99-year lease by Mr Isard for the "Old Bull" brewhouse in Centenary Place (closed in 1773), the small group erected a new building and named it Bethel Chapel, the first nonconformist chapel in the town (1788).

It stood behind what was for many years the General Post Office on West Street, now the "Bird and Bun", but it seems the children's school continued to use the wooden building in Isard's Yard.

For the next 47 years the chapel appointed "superintendents" to manage their affairs and used itinerant preachers from London to conduct services. The London Itinerant Society described the Chapel as following the "independent or congregational form of worship doctrine and government".

John Dunkin described Bethel in his 1815 *History of Bromley* as: "Near the Market Place is a small meeting house belonging to the dissenters of the Independent denomination. The preachers are chiefly supplied by the Itinerant Society which also supports the Sunday school in this place. The congregation is very small and the chapel itself a mean structure."

One itinerant preacher was John Bromley, a businessman, surveyor and auctioneer of Commercial Road, London, and it was he who purchased a plot of land on Widmore Road from Mr Cator as the site for a new Bethel Chapel which opened in 1835.

The pews were purchased from a church in Tooley Street demolished to make way for London Bridge Station and the Greenwich Railway. However, the most influential figure in the 18th century dissenter movement was Selina, Dowager Duchess of Huntingdon (1707- 91), who committed all her time and money to building new independent churches at home and abroad. Through her social status she gave them a degree of respectability that helped to attract adherents of "the middling sort".

"Lady Huntingdon's Connexion" at Bishopsgate became the headquarters for the London Itinerant Society where preachers from many persuasions offered their services. All were required to accept the doctrine of the Church of England and use

Feature

the Book of Common Prayer. It was Mr Bromley who insisted the new Chapel on Widmore Road agree to Lady Huntingdon's "15 Articles of Faith". The new Bethel Chapel could seat 500 people but at its opening there were only 19 members. Fortunately, it appointed able and vigorous ministers who attracted an ever-growing membership.

The first Minister, George Verrall (1837 - 56), received a small honorarium, not a salary. The trustees of his church were all Bromley residents — Benjamin Beezley (grocer), Joseph Miller (plumber), John Humphries (corn factor), Thomas Warren (gardener), Thomas Greenaway (brewer) and Thomas Lamb (schoolmaster). By the 1860s the building was often full to capacity and was enlarged in 1862. In 1881 it was rebuilt to accommodate even larger numbers and in 1896 expanded yet again to seat 1,000 worshippers and a Sunday school of up to 600 children supported by 50 teachers.

For rebuilding the church and new schoolrooms the remarkable sums of £14,500 and £1,400 were expended. The *Bromley Record* celebrated the official opening of the rebuilt church in 1886 with a three-column report beginning with the words: "It is not often that the reopening of a chapel consequent with completion of its enlargement creates such a stir in the neighbourhood like ours as attended the reopening of the Congregational Church in Widmore Road of which RH Lovell is pastor."

The newspaper then gave a detailed account of the building and its internal features — a stone gallery supported on granite columns of red and green with tastefully decorated balustrade. An account of the sermons and the hymns sung in morning and evening services followed.

From where did Bethel Church draw its members? A surprising number were tradespeople and businessmen of the town with names still remembered by older residents of Bromley. The first three "superintendents" of the church were James Churcher (shoemaker), Benjamin Beezley (grocer), and Barnabus Blake (draper). Mr Churcher's daughter Amelia was the first child baptised at Bethel Church in



Bethel Chapel, Widmore Road, 1835 – 1881

1790. Other Bromley business families were Isard (ironmonger), Unwin (printer), Pamphilon (wine and spirits), Pfiel (pawnbroker/jeweller) and John Hall (tallow chandler), a major benefactor of Bromley. He along with Mr Acton founded the Bromley Philanthropic Society. Both men are much praised in Horsburgh's *History of Bromley*. Some businessmen had achieved success elsewhere, including WR Spicer (wholesale stationer), EF Duncanson (shipping), Sir Henry Collett (draper) and Sir Frank Alexander (shipping). It was Mr Spicer who paid one-third of building costs in 1881 and was invited to lay the foundation stone. In 1920 Miss Elizabeth Spicer purchased a large detached house on Hayes Road to provide a manse for the Church Minister.

The growth of dissent in Bromley so worried the Vicar of Bromley Parish Church, the Rev AG Hellicar, that in response to a parishioner's letter in 1878 he wrote, "Dissent is rife here and will increase if no strong measures are taken against it — in the last six months two dissenting chapels have been built here."

Not content with his success in Bromley, the Minister, Robert Lovell, saw it as his duty to take the Christian message still further and set about establishing mission churches in West Wickham (1888) and Shortlands (1891), both largely financed by the "mother" church on Widmore Road. This mission work continued into the 1930s when Hayes Free Church was built. Between 1905 and 1945 church members



Bromley Congregational Church seen from the corner of Market Square, about 1907

Feature



*Bromley Congregational Church
Widmore Road 1881-1940*

served as home until 1957 when a new one was opened. However, social changes and migration of church families continued in post-war years, resulting in declining church membership. By the 1970s, the small and decreasing number of children attending Sunday school signalled years of faster decline despite church optimism when in 1972 the United Reformed Church was founded from the amalgamation of Congregational and Presbyterian churches. Today, the small congregation consists only of ageing adults and the once-vigorous and lively church faces an uncertain future, its buildings now being used largely for charitable purposes.

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supplied four Mayors of Bromley: Bertram Pearce, E Ford Duncanson , BA Glanville, FW Isard and two Lord Mayors of London, Sir Charles Collett (1933-34) and Sir Frank Alexander (1944-45).

The inter-war years 1919-39 witnessed continued growth when membership peaked at 570 and many cultural and social activities were established.

By then the church managed an adult choir of 50, a Children's Church of 85 that elected its own six deacons, three male and three female, Youth Fellowship, Musical and Literary Society and a Tennis club. After the war it formed a Badminton club and Drama Society

All this was brought to a complete halt on the night of 16 April 1941 when the building was totally destroyed by enemy bombing. A temporary church was erected and this

The Staples family and the history of Crofton Place farmhouse

Peter Jones

Along with his love of the history of Chelsfield Village, the late Geoff Copus carried out a great deal of research on other places and areas, including Crofton, Orpington.

The Manor of Crofton came under the jurisdiction of the King's Hospital (now St Thomas's) and the Dean and Chapter of the Savoy. Geoff's research on the Manor took in the Stable, Staple and Staples families who occupied the land, generally as Yeomen. This interested me as I have Staple ancestors.

This short article focuses on Crofton Place Farmhouse and some of its owners/inhabitants. It was demolished around 1954. There is also a picture of the farmhouse on the Bromley Historic Collections picture website:

<https://boroughphotos.org/bromley/>

In the 1500s, the farmhouse was in the possession of John Staple (Snr), a Yeoman, and may have been occupied earlier by his father, also named John.

John Sta(b)le (Snr) of Crofton is listed in 1545 in Geoff Copus's transcriptions of the records of the Manor of Mayfield/Little Orpington with tenanted land of croft, wood and parcels of land in that Manor. John Staple is also included in the Survey of the Manor of Crofton 1561.¹

Around 1593, under a Deed of Conveyance, John gave Crofton Place Farm and other local properties, to his eldest son, Peter (Peeter), who was blind. John passed away in 1600. There is no mention of Peter in John's will of 1597.²

Five years later, around 1605, Peter submitted a Bill of Complaint to the London Chancery as his Mother, Agnes, and his two younger brothers, Robert & John (Jnr) were claiming equal shares of the Estate for all the sons under "Gavelkind".³

By the time the case was heard, Agnes had passed away. The two younger brothers lost and it was deemed by the Lord Chancellor that Peter was to be left alone to enjoy his property. As part of their campaign against Peter, the two brothers had stolen his deeds and caused damage to his property. The Lord Chancellor ordered that the two brothers return the deeds to him.

But in 1606 it was Peter Staple who was causing trouble. The records of the Crofton Manor Court show he was inciting others to cut down a multiplicity of trees and was responsible for damage caused by his animals on Crofton Heath.

In 1608 a letter was sent to the Governors of St Thomas's Hospital, which included the Lord Mayor of London, requesting for Peter Staples (interestingly he was referred to as a Farmer of the Manor and not a Yeoman) to be allowed to carry on with his

farm on the Crofton Manor. This must have been successful as he remained there until his demise.

The family squabbles continued because in 1609 Peter Staple was ordered to open up a road blocking out Robert Staple — presumably his younger brother — or be fined five shillings (25p — five days labour for a skilled tradesman).⁴

But his relationship with his sister, Agnes (or Ann) must have been a lot warmer. She married Francis Stich in London in 1579 under a Bishop of London Licence and they had a son, Thomas Stich (*sic*).

In 1621, Peter Staple, under a Enfeoffment Agreement (*viz*, pledge of land against service), granted Thomas Stich, Gentleman of London, to hold forever Crofton Place Farm and other property. At this time Crofton Place Farm is noted as being in the possession of a Thomas Haywood, possibly as a tenant.

Peter, a bachelor, died in 1625 and he apparently lived to be 100. In his will of 1622, he left monies to various family members and others. He left Crofton Place Farm, his capital messuage and all other properties and lands to Thomas Stich and his heirs. His will was proved in February 1625.

Later in the 17th century, Crofton Place Farm passed into new ownership, that of the Styth family who also owned nearby Crofton Place. But not for long. In 1700, Sir Richard Styth, Baronet of St Martins in the Fields, Middlesex, and heir/executor to his father Sir William Styth, sold Crofton Place (described as mansion house) and several parcels of land to Thomas Snelling, brewer of Deptford/West Greenwich.

New owners of Crofton Place came and went. In 1813, William Key, Gentleman, of Blackfriars, and his wife sold Crofton Place with outbuildings and several parcels of land to William Luke, Warehouseman of West Smithfield.

Harry George Minshaw was the next owner. He leased part of the garden of Crofton Place to William Luke for a 25-year term.

By the middle of the 19th century Crofton Place and its farm had become part of the extensive Bromley holdings of the Norman family. In 1852, Henry Norman of Eaton Square, assigned and transferred Crofton Place to George Norman of Bromley Common for the remainder of a 2,000-year lease.

At some point in the Norman ownership the name of Crofton Place was changed to Crofton Lodge.

In 1873, a draft conveyance shows Crofton Lodge consisting of house, outbuildings, orchard, garden and pleasure garden. The conveyance includes Henry John Norman and others.

In 1891, a lease for Crofton Place under Henry John Norman, Hayes, is assigned from Edward Matthews to John Timbrell Milward.

Crofton Place Farm had many tenant farmers over these years. In 1861 the farm was listed under Harriet Westbrook, Head and Farmer, employing five men and

three boys. Various documents give us glimpses of life on the farm. In 1855 14 acres of meadow and 36 acres of seed and rye grass were put up for auction. In 1891, an estimate of £310 was set for laying a sewer to the farm. In 1910, the farm advertised for a “country woman” to carry out housework and to assist with poultry. The 1911 census reveals that the farmhouse had six rooms and was occupied by farm labourer John Woodgate, his wife, son and granddaughter.

As the 20th century opened the farm was already seen as potential building land. In 1909, a £3 deposit could secure a large plot of orchard land on Crofton Farm with potential to build a bungalow or house.

In 1924 there were bankruptcy proceedings in London related to Crofton Lodge, previously known as Crofton Place, and in 1927 the farm was put up for sale, listed by an estate agent as “a small old-fashioned residence”.

Perhaps it did not sell in 1927 for John Woodgate’s son was still there with members of his family and others when the 1939 Register was compiled in the early weeks of The Second World War. People were also living at Black Cottage and in two caravans on the farm. The farm, by then run-down and dilapidated, was demolished in 1954.

No trace of the house or its foundations remain in 2022. Had it survived it may have been one of the oldest houses in Bromley. Its close neighbour, Clay Farm Farmhouse (Crofton Farm), still exists, however, being a listed building with 14th century attributes.

Footnotes

¹Survey of the Manor of Crofton, 1561 -- [judithhabgood \(wordpress.com\)](https://judithhabgood.wordpress.com)

²The Will of John Staple, 1597. PROB11/90 -- [judithhabgood \(wordpress.com\)](https://judithhabgood.wordpress.com)

³Gavelkind is a system of inheritance in which a deceased person's land is divided equally among all male heirs.

⁴nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter

Sources

Geoffrey Copus Collection

Bromley Archives and Museum Collection

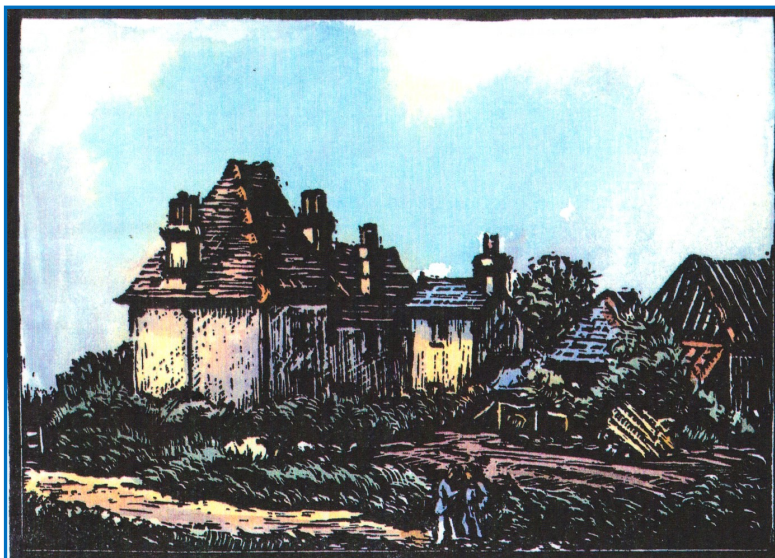
National Archives

Lambeth Palace Library

Court Rolls, Crofton Manor

Shortly before Crofton Place Farm was demolished, an unknown local artist captured the rear of the building in the painting pictured on the back page of this edition of *Bromleag*. It is from the Geoffrey Copus Collection.

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*Crofton Place Farm —
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See Page 33*

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