

Harefield History Society

NEWSLETTER No.5

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Staying in touch with members and friends of the Harefield History Society around the world.

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Editorial

By the time you read this newsletter, I hope and expect that most you will have had your first dose of Covid-19 vaccine (if not your second). I also hope that the longed for light at the end of the tunnel is appearing much brighter now. However, it is still not time for us to resume our monthly meetings and so, I am afraid to say, you will again have to make do with another of my idle scribbings.

The good news is that the article in the January newsletter concerning the 309 bus has generated a lot of interest and correspondence. Daisy South, who lives in Hill End, remembers it well because it ran as far as the Vernon Arms public house, where it turned at the entrance to Weybeards Farm. The service was well used for trips to Rickmansworth for shopping and the cinemas (there were two) and, in the summer, to the Aquadrome. It was a bad day when it stopped running. Years later, when the Harefield Nursing Home opened, Daisy raised a petition to get the service reinstated but Transport for London would not take it on.

Another respondent, Guy Marriott, who is clearly a serious bus enthusiast, sent a long letter with much very interesting detail on the history of the 309 bus service and the services which served Harefield before and after this route existed. I plan to write this up as an article for the website, but for now here are the most relevant details.

The bus in the picture is GS 57, one of 84 such buses purchased by London Transport for its "Country Area" (green bus) routes in 1953. This type of bus was withdrawn from service at the beginning of 1968 and subsequently sold. The 309 bus route was operated from London Transport's Garston Garage, which ran four of these GS buses on routes around Rickmansworth. Records show the actual bus in the photograph was in service at Garston from March 1963 and May 1967, which means the photo must have been taken between these dates.



(three more examples of the GS class bus like our 309)

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From the Archives

Connie Johnson (26th October 1888 - 16th October 1970)

October 2020 marked the 70th anniversary the death of **Connie Johnson** who many of you will remember was the Vergeress at St Mary's. I was reminded of her by the photo on the right below taken by Reg Neil in 1965 at the Rogation Day ceremony. Connie does not appear in the photo but I realised that the building behind the crowd of people was Connie Johnson's cottage.

Connie was born in the cottage and you can see it again below, on the left, with Connie sitting on on her mother's knee and again, many years later, standing outside the front door.



The 1891 and 1901 census returns show Connie living (aged 2 and 12) with her parents at this house in Church Gardens. However, by the time of the 1911 census she was living at the Vicarage as parlour maid for Revd. Albert Harland. Her mother was then the Vergeress and, as a young teenager, Connie would help her mother with her church duties. She continued to spend the rest of her life working for the Church, becoming officially the Vergeress herself after her mother died and just before the war. The 1939 survey shows her living in the house with her widowed father, and the photo on the left shows her with the Revd Denis Connor outside St Mary's.

The house was never modernised. Connie preferred the simple life and refused to have gas or electricity installed or even a telephone. I wondered what happened to the house after she died and believed (wrongly) that it must have been demolished. The problem was that I didn't know exactly where the house stood.



So, one day last summer, I went for a walk near the Church Gardens, now privately owned, to see if I could find any ruins indicating where it might have stood. Not being able to



find anything, I was just walking away when the owner of Church Gardens appeared, curious to know what I was doing. I explained and was very happy to learn that, far from being knocked down, the house has now been renovated and incorporated into the Church Gardens estate. The front cannot be seen from the

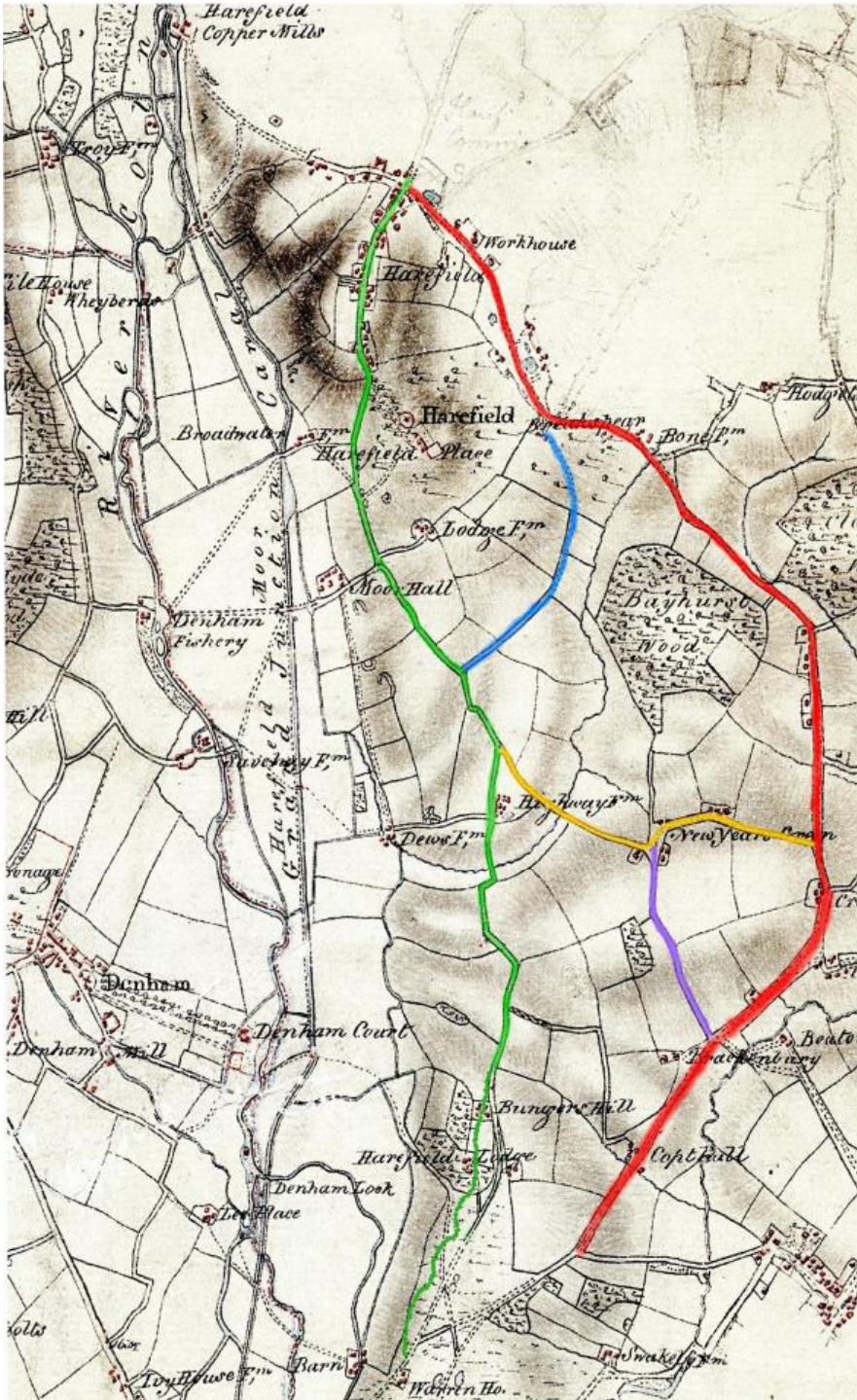
footpath because it faces inwards into the courtyard at the entrance to the gardens. You can still recognise the house in the aerial photo above right, and can see its location relative to St Mary's church and ANZAC cemetery in the image above. Those of you who visited the gardens on one of the rare open days will have walked right past the house.

Connie's death in 1970 left a big hole in the Harefield community. Her obituary appeared in the parish magazine along with many tributes, memories and anecdotes from people she new and cared for in the parish. She had spent her whole life dedicated to her work for the church. She performed her last duties at St Mary's on October 3rd, just 13 days before she died.



Putting the Record Straight

Our resident super sleuth, **Keith Piercy**, has been researching the often repeated suggestion appearing in the published works about the parish of Harefield, which says that the line of the original north-south route from Uxbridge to Harefield and on to Rickmansworth, followed the line of the modern Breakspear Road. The source of this assertion is the book "**Victoria County History of Middlesex**" (VCH) which says that "**Hill End Road, Park Lane and Harvil Road were all in existence in 1813, but led only to farms and the common.**"



The map shown here is taken from Keith's book "*Mapping an English Parish before 1870*" (page 73), and is a draft for the Ordnance Survey drawn in 1805 but with the odd later modification. I have highlighted several relevant roads as follows:-

Red for Breakspear Road North and South (the section from Breakspear house to the village was actually called Harefield Lane until the 1920s).

Green for Harvil Road (the section south of Bungers Hill Farm is only a representation of the route before the current line was built).

Yellow for New Years Green Lane.

Purple for the now closed route from half way along New Years Green Lane towards Ickenham.

Blue for the drive from Harvil Road to Breakspear House.

One might still question why use Breakspear Road to go to Harefield when there appears to be a route up the purple road to New Years Green and then across to Harvil Road. However, VCH goes on to say that "**As a result of the enclosure of 1813 some of the roads were changed. The southern fork of New Years Green Lane was closed; Harvil Road and Springwell Lane were both extended, one to Uxbridge and the other to Rickmansworth**".

Keith has discovered that the mistake made in VCH is the assertion that before 1813 Harvil Road only went to farms and didn't reach as far as Uxbridge. He has studied the enclosure map of 1813 and explains in his report that the route taken by the southern end of Harvil Road ran through various peoples land.

Keith also points out that several 18th century maps also suggest that Harvil Road was the through route (and not Harefield Lane), and 17th century maps only show Harvil Road.

His final set of evidence comes from the historical geography of Harefield. The Harvil Road – Church Hill – High Street – Rickmansworth Road route passes close by virtually all the important sites of the parish (Harefield Lodge, Dews Farm, Moor Hall, Harefield Place, Harefield Church, the housing along the High Street, Harefield House, Harefield Common, Harefield Park and the Grove).

The one building not on this route is Breakspear House, for which access was a drive (shown in blue on the map) down to Harvil Road, with a lodge at the end. You can still see the entrance to the drive on Harvil Road about half way between Moor Hall Road and New Years Green Lane. Why would the owners of Breakspear House build such a drive to Harvil Road unless Harvil Road was the main road through the parish? (*The current drive on Breakspear Road was not built until 1904*).

* A copy of Keith's report will be put on the society website in due course.

Mary Deyncourt Billyard-Leake

Nicole Bray kindly sent me the following cutting which she found while researching in the National Library of Australia. It is an obituary published in a New South Wales newspaper (Bowral Free Press and Berrima District Intelligencer) on Saturday 12th March 1898. It is a little hard to read so here is a transcript:-

Obituary. Mr. and Mrs. Billyard-Leake's Child.

We briefly alluded to this event in our last. We have now before us the "**Rickmansworth News**," local paper for Harefield and district, England, dated 26th January, 1898 and from it we glean the following particulars, for the bereaved family were well-known in Bowral before leaving for England some few years ago:

Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Leake, the new owners of Harefield Park, have, as we announced last week, sustained a severe loss by the death of their **little daughter Mary**, who was, it is well-known, a most beautiful child of four. After a long illness of whooping cough and bronchitis she became very much worse about a fortnight since. The best medical advice procurable was obtained, including an eminent London physician, but all to no purpose. The little sufferer was released from life's ills on the morning of Tuesday last week, the 18th instant.

The funeral took place yesterday (Tuesday) afternoon at the Harefield Parish Church, the officiating clergyman being the Rev. Louis K. Hilton, vicar of Semley, Wilts. The procession started from Harefield Park shortly before 2 o'clock, the coffin being borne on white funeral napkins by four of the servants, Messrs. Dale (butler), Cope (Coachman), Batchelor (gardener), and Smith (footman). The coffin was covered in white with a white satin pall with corded silk tassels and cord, with the initials "M.D.B.-L." in the centre. The coffin was followed by the following mourners in private carriages : - Mr. and Mrs. C. Billyard-Leake (parents), Miss Letitia B. Leake (sister), Master Edward B. Leake (brother), Mrs. Peel, Mrs. and Miss Hamilton, Miss Moseley, Lady Willshire, Dr. S. Jervois Aarons, Dr. Johnston Little, Rev. A. A. Harland, Nurse Walker, Mrs. Dale, Mrs. Martin, Mlle. Clere, and other servants of the estate.

The grave itself presented such a display of loveliness as has seldom or ever been known in the district. Under the careful hands of Mr. Batchelor, the head gardener, and his assistants, the opening presented to the eye nothing but a complete lining of chaste and beautiful flowers. The engraved coffin plate bore the following inscription:-

MARY DEYNCOURT BILLYARD-LEAKE,
Born 28th Dec., 1893.
Died 18th Jan., 1898.

The number of wreaths was very great, and afforded unmistakable evidence of wide-spread sympathy; that from the father and mother being especially lovely.



As I am sure you know, Charles Billyard-Leake was the gentleman who owned Harefield Park and who generously gave it over in WW1 to the NSW government for use as a hospital for the ANZAC wounded. However, Nicole and I were unaware of the tragedy that had befallen the Billyard Leakes some 16 years earlier. Nicole asked if I could verify that the four year old Mary was definitely buried in our churchyard. And sure enough, when I consulted the list of burials (which covers the period from 1538 - 1993), I found Mary on the 24th January 1898 (which is a Monday rather than a Tuesday as recorded in the obituary). However, the column on the burials document which is supposed to contain the plot number, is blank.

Nevertheless, I visited the churchyard twice to look for Mary's grave but could not find it. The inscriptions on many of the old gravestones are now very difficult or impossible to read.



Then, one day I stumbled upon a photo (on the Internet) described as the grave of Charles Billyard-Leake. The inscription for Charles is on the base of the tall cross. Nothing was said about the statue of a child standing in front of the cross. Could this be the location of Mary's grave (and possibly part of the reason why Charles' body was brought back to Harefield for burial?)

I have since returned to the churchyard and sure enough, the statue does mark the grave of little Mary. Here is how the statue looks today.



The inscription is on the front of the plinth and reads:-

In Loving Remembrance
of
MARY DEYNCOURT
second daughter of
Charles Billyard-Leake
and Lettie his wife
born 28th December 1893
died 18th January 1898

