

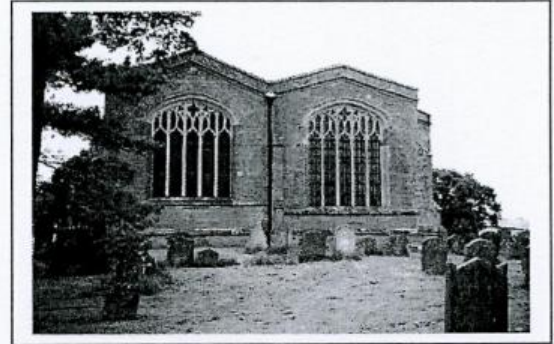
# Harefield History Society

Affiliated to the Uxbridge Guild of Arts

Newsletter no. 47 Summer 2004

## Committee

T Hillier	Chairman
B Waterman	Secretary
A Batchelor	Treasurer
R Goodchild	Programme
M Marjoram	Newsletter
J Hillier	
M Dawson	



Saint Mary the Virgin, Great Brington

## Summer Programme 2004

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2004 - Chartwell House, Gardens and Studio

Cost: £ 20 including admission to Chartwell House, £13 for National Trust Members

We will be Visiting Chartwell House, the home of Sir Winston Churchill from 1924. On our arrival we will be given a short talk on the property and its history on the coach. A further talk entitled 'Sir Winston Churchill. the artist' is available in the garden Studio. In addition, guide Stewards are in many of the rooms in the house. Much of the house is as he left it, with the addition of a Museum.

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003 - Brington Church and Althorp

Cost: £ 22.00 including admission to Althorp

Alice Spencer, Dowager Countess of Derby, who's monument was laid in the Chancel of Harefield's Church and who bequeathed the Almshouses in Harefield has links with both the places we will be visiting on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2004. The tomb of her parents Sir John Spencer and Katherine Kitson is to be seen at St. Mary the Virgin, Great Brington. They are also the ancestors of Sir Winston Churchill.

Alice Spencer spent much of her formative years at Althorp. The visit to Althorp home of the Spencer family for nearly 500 years, includes an introductory briefing and an audio tour of the house. View the collection of Portraiture, Porcelain and Furniture including works by William Vile, Reynolds and Meissen.

*To enable the society to continue offering outings of a historical nature, it is crucial our coaches are full. This will also enable us to reduce future costs. If you know of any individual or group who maybe interested in out coach trips, please pass on the details of the above days out.*

## Winter Programme 2004/5

27<sup>th</sup> September 2004 Speaker to be confirmed

The Harefield History Society winter meetings are held in park Lane Village Centre and start at 8 p.m. Visitors are welcome.

## REGINALD GABRIEL NEIL

Twenty four years ago, following a course of W.E.A lectures, the History Society was formed. Reg was a founder member when Eileen Bowlt of Ruislip, gave the first lecture. I don't know when he first became a committee member, for that matter, when he ceased but during his time of service, mostly as Treasurer, he gave unstinting support and advice. This attitude of support has continued since he left the committee and on several occasions, I have been grateful for his advice and help.

His forte in the Society had three main thrusts: I have already mentioned his committee work. The second subject for which, we in Harefield, owe Reg a debt is his love of recording the reminiscences of Harefield folk. He started doing this in the late 1970's and had a collection of some thirty recordings, mostly of older people, which are of historical interest and value to the extent of being the foundation of two historical books on Harefield - 'HAREFIELD AT THAT TIME OF DAY' and 'LIFE IN THE MIDDLESEX VILLAGE' -by Geoff Tyack. (Tutor of W.E.A. lectures) He never completed his intended work on the recording of others but, perhaps someone will assume his mantle and continue this valuable and what should be an ongoing venture.

I have kept his third, and probably his most valuable contribution to last. Most people who know anything about Reg will know his connection with photography. He trained early in life and used the expertise he gained throughout his life. He used to describe himself as a "self-taught amateur" but his work belies this, for his work was extremely professional. He only stopped taking photos recently. In his loft, Reg had boxes of some 2000+ photos as well as a number of slides and recording on prints of various documents. His range of subjects was very wide - he used to record buildings that he knew were about to be destroyed before, during and after the replacement had been built: the old Methodist Church is a good example of this. He took photos of individuals and groups. He photographed documents etc. enlarged them and then, in many cases, laminated them to help preserve them. His copies of old photos and buildings are superb - the thirteen policemen with their pushbikes are an example of this. He was always available and willing to help people with slides or photos for lectures etc. and gave many slide-illustrated lectures himself. If he thought it was necessary, he was always willing to retake or update a photo - the lecture on the Coalposts around Harefield are an example of this.

His memory was phenomenal and he could always lay his hand on a given photo - though I doubt if any else could, despite them having numbers on the back. This leads to my last point - the collection that Reg owned is an invaluable historical asset and I was invited to a meeting, organized by Reg, early in 2004, consisting of several interested parties with a view to cataloguing, storing and preserving the collection for the future. This is an ongoing project and would, I feel, would make an appropriate memorial to Reg. On receiving my service sheet for Reg's funeral, I was delighted to find that Cynthia had requested that gifts made would be shared between establishing The Harefield Photographic History Library and the R.N.L.I. Our grateful thanks go to Cynthia for the generous proposal.



T.Hillier (Chairman, Harefield History Society)

## MAY ISAACS - an obituary 21st January 2004

It is with great sorrow that I report the death of May Isaacs. May came into the History Society's Committee in 1998 and since then she has worked willingly and tirelessly for the good of the Society. Whenever a job needed doing, May was there, willing and capable of delivering on time. In the Millennium Year celebrations, she took her place on the float as Queen Elizabeth. She composed quizzes for the Millennium and Jubilee Celebrations. She wrote the Society's Newsletters for several years and represented the Society on the Park Lane Village Centre committee. She was a quality photographer whose work has figured on the Harefield Calendar and finally she persuaded her husband, Gordon, to continue to check the state of the Society's finances.

For nearly a year May fought a courageous battle with the illness to which early this year, she finally succumbed. May will be greatly missed by our Society and we send our condolences to Gordon and their family

T.Hillier (Chairman)

## SPENCER HOUSE St.James's Place, St.James's Street, London

Built in 1756-66 for the first Earl Spencer this is the finest surviving 18th century town house, which has regained the splendour of its appearance after a ten year restoration programme masterminded by Lord Rothschild. The nine state rooms are among the finest neo-classical interiors in Europe containing a fine collection of paintings and furniture of the period.

The first Earl Spencer was an heir to the Duchess of Marlborough and was prepared to pay for perfection. The site chosen was overlooking Green Park. The Spencer family left the house in 1927, taking most of its chimneypieces, doors and other decorative features as well as its furnishings with them. From then until 10 years ago the building was used as premises for The Ladies' Army and Navy Club and as offices, it was also damaged by wartime bombing.

The meticulous seven-year restoration, encompassing not only architectural and decorative features but also reinstatement of furnishings, making a showcase for the current renaissance in British craftsmanship of the highest quality

Furniture and paintings were tracked down, not only at the Spencer seat Althorp, but also in other private collections, including the Queen's, at National Trust properties and at museums on both sides of the Atlantic. Where the originals have not been bought or borrowed, they have been painstakingly copied- each Carrara marble chimneypiece taking more than 6'000 hours to carve.

Best of all, the house is not a museum but once again a convivial place dedicated to hospitality, as the first Earl Spencer (21) and his wife Georgina Poyntz (18) conceived it. It can be hired for receptions and dinners and was the scene of the 1992 dinner given for the Queen by all the Prime Ministers.

This house has to be seen to take in its grandeur. The nearest Tube Station is Green Park and if you turn into the Park and walk down the broad path, access to St. James's Place is through a path on the left hand side. Guided tours can be arranged.

(Telephone number 020 7409 0526) Entrance £6.50 Numbers limited to 40

## **THE ROSSES – 40 YEARS IN HAREFIELD**

“I have found just the property we are all looking for – a terrace of 7 derelict houses called Riverside Cottage, on the towpath between the Grand Union Canal and the River Colne at Coppermill Lock in Harefield – the terrace plus 2½ acres of land selling for £6,000 ” Michael Hirst, one of John’s work colleagues, said this one Monday morning early in 1962. We had never heard of Harefield, but it was the beginning of a long and happy association.

The terrace, originally called Workers Row, was built in about 1802 by the Mines Royal Company for their copper workers at the mill. The company used to ship copper by barge to their mill in the eastern side of the canal, from their mines in Wales to be rolled into copper sheeting and cast into bells. Copper sheeting produced in Harefield sheathed the bottoms of most of the ships of the British Navy in the Napoleonic Wars, including Nelson’s Victory. There is also, apparently, Harefield copper sheet on the roof of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Later the mill was called The Bell Works, then the United Asbestos Company and after that the Harefield Rubber Company, which made industrial rubber products. The area is now called Royal Quay, with the old buildings having been carefully renovated and converted into offices and a new building added.

There was a long struggle finding mortgages, as “the property was 160 years old, was not on a made road and there were no mains services!” Vandals had smashed all the windows and doors and had ripped out the very rudimentary electric wiring. Each cottage had only one cold-water tap in a lean-to scullery at the back and there was a row of brick built privies at the bottom of the gardens. In 1960, the Council was still sending a man each night with a handcart to empty the soil! When we approached the Council for mortgages (council’s used to give mortgages in those days), there was a scream of horror! “We are pulling those down as they are insanitary and we have re-housed all the occupants in council housing in the village!” The vendors had not told us about the demolition order!

Finally, four couples – the husbands worked in the same architect’s office in central London, bought all seven “two up two down” cottages and the land. A younger couple (the Harbers) with no children took No.4, the single cottage at the northern end, and added an extension. (Elona and Cuth Cuthbertson bought this cottage a year later, and made further additions. After Elona died in 1991 and Cuth moved to Rottingdean, their son Toby and his family moved in and are still there). Two other families (the Hirsts and the Bailys) and we, with our three little ones, bought two cottages each. Derrick and Margaret Mundie No.2 from the Bailys in 1965. Now, 40 years after moving in, only the Hirsts in No.1 and the Rosses in No.3 of the original four families remain.

As we were modernising the cottages the Council rescinded the demolition order and gave us each 100% standard and 100% discretionary grants – the first time that had happened in the district! We then added a damp proof course, and new roof, floors, doors and windows, electrical and hot and cold water systems, baths, showers and toilets. The planners also required us to provide parking spaces and garages off the towpath and the Thames Conservancy required a proper sewage treatment works (complete with dual pumps, settlements tanks and clinker bed) behind the garages, as the effluent was to discharge into the River Colne. The Environment Agency still checks the quality of the effluent regularly. When the restoration work was complete the Dept. of Environment locally listed the terrace.

In December 1963, we finally moved into 3 Coppermill Lock with Richard aged 3 ¾, Tish just 2 and Ali 4 months old. Our funds were exhausted by the basic builders’ work and there was not a lick of paint in the house and no joinery. All that was for John, Ann and the children to do. John built the kitchen fittings and all other built-in wardrobes and fittings from scratch. Ann painted the walls with a roller at high level and Richard and Tish painted at low level with brushes. Ali, when she could crawl, managed to eat the still soft putty in a caulked joint to a toilet and had to have her stomach pumped out!

The builders had thrown all the old rusty nail ridden timber and rubble from the demolition work out of the back door so there was a lot of work to do before we had a garden. Also, the privies and concrete paths had to be demolished. We recovered all that was worth saving, including a lovely (but rusty) cast iron Georgian fireplace that we cleaned and installed in our sitting room (the original fireplace was broken by the builders). We saved and cleaned the bricks from the privies and used them to terrace the garden. John was bricklayer and Ann and children were the navies, mixing concrete and mortar etc! We even saved the least damages of the old doors and used them to floor the loft! There were however, quite a few trips to Casualty at Mount Vernon, due to rusty nails in feet and tumbles over rubble. Ann, in desperation, put up some wire netting fencing and paved a small patio on top of the rubble, using the old brick paviers saved from the floors in the house, to have an outdoor play area for the children.

Very early on Ann took the children to the swimming pool at Watford. Learning to swim in a hurry was a high priority with the canal at the front door and the river behind! John, during this time was also extremely busy at work so his time at home was very precious.

To clear the demolitions and start on the garden, we organised work-parties at weekends providing unlimited beer and a good lunch in the fresh country air for the young folk from the office in return for some healthy exercise with a sledgehammer or wheelbarrow! Two of those helpers, Ann and Will Spencer, have recently moved into No. 2 next-door, 40 years later, when our long standing neighbour and dear friend Margaret Mundie moved to Devon.

Soon after we had moved in and were starting to enjoy the solitude, the wildlife, and the wonderful views across Lynster's Lake, we often found people on the towpath with their noses against our windows. "We used to live here," they said, "and we liked it so much better than living in the council houses in the village!" They were all very sorry to leave Coppermill, and we understood exactly what they meant. Sue Sayward in the village grew up in our house, before her family was moved out for the proposed demolition!

One of the first village people we met was Walter Winton, on the towpath outside our house. As a local ward councillor he was investigating a plague of midges along the canal. He and Dorothy became very good friends of ours. At probably our first dinner party at No. 3 Walter, looking out across our garden and over Lynster's Lake, said, "I wish Councillor Woodhams could see this now. You should have heard him in the Council Chamber arguing for the demolition order!" His case was "How can you condemn people to live in those dreadful houses." Councillor Woodhams was of course responsible for the loss of many fine old buildings in the village, but thankfully ours survived.

After a few months at Coppermill, while Ann was registering Richard at Harefield Infants School, Miss Bateman the headmistress, asked if we knew any Harefield people and suggested that Ann join the Women's Club. There she met other mums with toddlers and together they started a pre-school playgroup and babysitting co-op. People we met then have remained firm friends ever since. We also joined the Community Centre, where we played tennis and enjoyed many social activities.

All this was a wonderful revelation after renting houses in the commuter dormitories of Stanmore and then Watford, where no one spoke to each other and there wasn't the friendly atmosphere that we found so welcoming in Harefield. All three of our children went through the Infant and Junior schools in the village before going elsewhere for their secondary schooling.

Later, we joined the History Society, which we thoroughly enjoy. John was invited to join the Harefield Conservation Area Advisory Panel and the Village Forum and he became a Trustee of the Harefield Parochial Charities. Ann listens to reading at the Junior School one morning a week. We also tidy Harefield, have become involved with St Mary's Church and we both serve on the committee for the Heart of Harefield campaign to save Harefield Hospital.

Life in the village is rewarding, full of interest, most enjoyable, and the people are so friendly!

## STARTING MARRIED LIFE IN HAREFIELD

In 1958 Beryl & I were looking for a home, and had spent several weekends driving around on our motorcycle looking for a house that was both within our price range and from where it was possible for us both to get to work.

We had both visited Harefield on Sunday School outings when we were young, and were delighted to find a house that was just within our budget in Leys Close.

Our house, at the end of the road was the last house to be built and occupied owing to the first buyers being unable to obtain a mortgage. The houses were constructed in 1958 by Francis Jackson Ltd. Who were based in Ickenham. They purchased Leys Cottage and the surrounding land obtaining permission to build 24 semi-detached houses in a cul-de sac.

Since our house is one of a pair that are at the end of the Close, our back garden in 1958 looked out on to open fields that have since become the Ash Grove Estate. Both cows and horses grazed on this land and because we were without street lighting, it was not uncommon to bump into an animal that had strayed into our back garden from the field behind.

When our house was completed, I moved in by myself until Beryl and I were married in 1959. The bus service was rather worse than it is to-day and since I was working in North London and had to start work at 8-30 am, a cheap form of transport was essential, once again the motorcycle fitted the bill. I still remember arriving at work in Camden Town in the winter, being almost frozen to the bike, and the agony as my various extremities warmed up and slowly came back to life!

There were a lot of children living in our road and in those days, since very few people had cars, it was safe for them to play in the Close and front gardens. It was quite usual to have a dozen children in our house and garden, then they would all disappear to play in another house down the road.

Our two younger children attended the nursery school run by Daisy South and this proved an excellent grounding for them prior to joining Harefield Infants School. Beryl & I well remember our daughters complaining about the large spiders that lurked in the primitive outside toilets of the old school. I suppose the demolition of the old school, and St. Mary's church hall, plus the building of the health centre are the most noticeable changes in the village centre.

Living in Leys Close now is quite different to the 1960's. Most young mothers have to rush their children off to school in order that they themselves can get to work and the car has become a necessity for the busy housewife, leaving no time for a chat or coffee morning! Sadly this means that it isn't possible to make the close friendships that happened when the houses were first occupied, although it is still a friendly road in which to live.

Another sad change in Harefield that is common to most places these days, is the damage caused by vandalism, graffiti, and the sheer volume of rubbish that is dropped everywhere. What would we do without the "Keep Harefield Tidy" group?

Martin Harrold.