



Entertainment
in
Harefield
in the
late C 19

(from the Middlesex Gazette)

M. Evans.

Leisure was in short supply in the lives of working people in the late 19th century. Nobody went away for holidays as we do today. On Sundays people went to church and possibly for a walk afterwards. Children might be kept from school in the fruit picking season, and they would work on farms in school holidays, earning a few pence.

Harefield had its Brewery, in Park Lane, and many pubs and beerhouses with no special hours of licensing. Beer was probably a welcome substitute for the doubtful water from surface wells and ponds.

However the regular Temperance meetings were very popular, reinforced by tea and the Band of Hope choir. Clothing Club meetings run by the gentry for the benefit of cottagers also offering tea, could provide a pleasant social evening. The Memorial Hall offered a venue for these and for Concerts, in aid of the Cricket Club, the Lending Library, the Choral Society, Gardeners' Benevolent Socy; Reading and Recreation Socy; Missions, etc., as well as lectures on many subjects

from The Second Coming, and the Reformation, to the Wonders of Electricity and Farming in the U.S.A., of which the last seemed to be the most appreciated. There was an occasion when the Vicar, operating his magic lantern, blew out all the windows as well as injuring his arm.

Harefield's gentry did a good deal towards entertaining the people. The first Horticultural Show was held at Breakspears in 1885 and in other years at The Grove, and Harefield House. This offered prizes to cottagers for flowers, fruit, vegetables, honey etc., and all the big estates showed produce. A band played, and if the weather was good, everyone had an enjoyable day. The Cox family at Harefield Place invited a large party of East End children every year, providing them with food and entertainment in rural surroundings for the day. The local school children had an annual Treat at Breakspears or The Grove, with a band, Punch and Judy, balloons and games and tea on the lawn.

Athletic sports were held on the Common two years running, and eight years later the Football and Cricket Clubs combined to restart this event.

Several activities were tried and not repeated - a terrier coursing event in Harefield Park, a fête at the Fisheries, and a Pigeon shoot. There were occasional visits from H.M. Staghounds, but the stag seemed to get involved in the canal and the factories, and it was always caught and taken away in a van.

Cricket was played every Summer. The annual dinner was at the King's Arms. In 1888 Mr. Winship and A. Phipps were awarded bats, Mr. Varcoe the cap for bowling and Mr. J. Garrett a ball for brilliant fielding.

Football began in 1891 with a concert to support the Victoria Club. Thereafter regular matches are reported.

There was an Easter Monday Fair on the Common, with roundabouts and

cheapjack stalls.

The Breakspear Institute at the corner of the Common was initiated in 1895 by Mr Tarleton of Breakspears with the help of a committee, as a Working Men's Club. Col. Vernon provided the site, and contributions were collected. The building and furniture cost £800. A year later membership was 100. Books and games had been given. Lectures were well attended, and it was decided to admit wives and daughters. The football and cricket clubs and a string band were all successful.

Harefield people were quite active in providing their own entertainment. The culmination was perhaps the presentation of plays in the village school, organised by Mr. and Mrs. Byles in aid of school funds. "Theatricals" wrote the Gazette Reporter, "at Harefield, the home of low churchism, and in her Village School, the nursery of orthodoxy ~ shade of the late Mr. Newdegate arise! and behold

what a falling off ~ " One has to realise that everyone belonged to a church in those days, and Church leaders as well as the gentry were highly respected and played an important part in Village life.