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The fight for Coulsdon Commons

On Monday 19 May 2008, close to the Fox public house, the City of London celebrated its purchase of Coulsdon Commons exactly 125 years before on Saturday 19 May 1883. The celebration was a low-key affair in contrast with the previous occasion. Three persons made short speeches: the Rt Hon. David Lewis, the debonair Lord Mayor of the City of London, Councillor Derek Millard, the ebullient Mayor of Croydon, and the more sedate Pauline Halliday, Chief Commoner, an office combining leadership of the City's Court of Common Council and the chairmanship of the City Lands. Helped by the sunny weather in an open air setting and liberated from claustrophobic indoor meetings, they allowed themselves to be upstaged by children from local schools playing contrasting styles of music and by the children selected to bury a time capsule besides the new fountain. Light refreshments were provided in a marquee and young ladies proffering drinks circulated among the guests. All in all it was a relaxed occasion.

How did the Corporation of the City of London come to buy Coulsdon Commons? Donovan Dawe wrote a fairly detailed explanation exactly forty years ago in the Bourne Society's Local History Records Vol. VII (1968) Here I follow more or less the same ground but there are differences in emphasis and additional sources have been used, chiefly the minute books of the Court of Common Council and of the Coal, Corn and Finance Committee.

Whereas it is relatively easy to understand how Croydon Council came to acquire nearby Happy Valley, it is more puzzling to understand why the City of London should venture to Coulsdon when it was located so far from the metropolis. In 1883 it was just a small village and parish in Surrey, not yet belonging to Croydon. Coulsdon Commons were not within convenient reach as the nearest railway station was Caterham Junction, as Purley station was then called.

Commons were largely uncultivated 'waste lands' but they were not without their uses and they were not ownerless. Farmers grazed cattle on them, sometimes with the owners' permission when it was necessary but sometimes it was unnecessary to seek permission when grazing was a traditional right over which the owner had no control. The public at large had no right of access.

At the time of the purchase of Coulsdon Commons farmers included those who had absolute ownership of their land, and those whose possession of land was qualified and whose exercise of the right of grazing was restricted. The former were the freeholders, a familiar term, but the others were copyholders, an unfamiliar term nowadays because in 1926 the law abolished this form of holding land by effectively turning copyholders into freeholders, leaving only the simple distinction of freeholder and leaseholder.

Copyholders were property holders whose possession and rights depended on the lord of the manor and the manorial court or simply on long established custom. The name derives from the custom of receiving a copy of the manorial roll concerning the property held. Such a copy served as the title deed. A sales advertisement in 1860 for Yew Tree House next to the Fox illustrates what this entails. The property belonged to the manor of Coulsdon and enjoyed rights of commons. As copyhold it was liable to pay a customary entry fine not exceeding two years' value exacted when a new copyholder took over from the previous incumbent, a quit-rent in lieu of manorial services and the tribute called heriot, the payment of the best beast to the lord of the manor on the death of the copyholder. How far these manorial customs were still observed in the 19th century is uncertain but they were stipulated in the sales particulars. Such customs can also be found for the manorial courts of the Archbishops of Canterbury in Croydon about the same time. Of the three 'incidents' as they were called, the most relevant is the quit-rent which, despite being a very small sum by the 19th century, still had some weight in law.

Coulsdon was a manor and in 1883 the lord of the manor was Edmund Byron. Thomas Byron, Edmund's father, was lord of the manor before his death in 1863 when Edmund inherited the manor. The parish of Coulsdon (which then included Purley) and the manor of Coulsdon shared the same extent, in all over four thousand acres, including several farms and the waste lands or commons of Riddlesdown, Kenley Common, Farthing (or Fairdene) Downs, Hartley Downs and Coulsdon Common. In 1762 the total acreage of the commons in Coulsdon amounted to 551 acres. By 1883 the Byrons had already enclosed Hartley Downs, fencing them in to prevent others grazing their cattle on them, and allowing him to make what use he liked of them. Edmund Byron intended to enclose more and had already begun enclosing some of Riddlesdown. Coulsdon Commons is the umbrella term embracing the several commons.

Though the Byrons had jurisdiction over all Coulsdon, they did not own all the parish, but they owned most of it. They were the squires and were thus able more or less to determine the number of cottages and the number of inhabitants. Such parishes were called close parishes as opposed to open parishes where there was no dominant landowner and therefore no restrictions on the number of newcomers. Sanderstead was another example of a close parish.

Commons were vanishing. At a rough reckoning one acre in seven had once counted as common land in England and Wales. In 1843 there were estimated to be ten million acres of common land, a figure which by 1874 had been reduced to roughly two to three million, much of it at risk of building development, especially around London. Little of the enclosed commons had been set aside for public access as open spaces or allotments. It was not simply a question of open spaces for recreation. Open spaces allowed fresh air into towns and cities, ventilation to disperse fetid air and improve public health. In Croydon Duppas Hill served these purposes when the Croydon Board of Health bought it in the 1860s.

London was no different. From the 1860s the preservation of the remaining commons in the vicinity of and within London became an issue thanks to influential individuals taking up their cause both locally and in Parliament. First it was Wimbledon Common, then Hampstead Heath which were saved from enclosure. Next, because Epping Forest was being plundered as numbers of landowners encroached upon it, the campaigners were able to induce the City of London to exercise its latent powers, for it owned a small area of freehold land within the Forest, in Wanstead, which it had bought to turn into a cemetery. As a freeholder the City of London could legally claim rights over all of what remained of Epping Forest. It was the combination of public opinion, public service and pressure groups, the most important of which was the Commons Preservation Society, founded in 1865, that moved the City of London to take the next and costly step of preserving Epping Forest by successfully taking fourteen landowners to court. Parliament passed legislation to assist the City, including the Metropolitan Commons Act passed in 1866 giving some protection to commons within a twenty five mile radius and the City of London (Open Spaces) Act passed in 1878 enabling the City to buy common land within this radius. Another law allowed the City to continue to levy a duty on corn coming into London, a duty abolished in a law passed in 1872 but which did not come into effect till 1902, so that the City had a regular source of money to purchase common land. The grain duty brought in

something like £20,000 a year (the figure should be multiplied a hundredfold to approximate to what it would be worth today). The City had already enjoyed the right of similarly levying a duty on coal to make improvements but that was to end in 1888.

After Epping Forest, Burnham Beeches was next to be bought. In total the City bought 6,703 acres, Epping Forest comprising 5,560 acres and Burnham Beeches 492 acres. What had started as an initiative now became a recognised procedure.

In each case local factors came into play. The City of London's intervention in Coulsdon was almost fortuitous. As Edmund Byron was intent on enclosing further common land and restricting the rights of those who wished to graze their cattle, two brothers, William and James Hall, farmers in Kenley, took him to court in 1873 on behalf of themselves and other freeholders and copyholders to prevent him from enclosing any further common land. However the brothers seem to have acted alone, without the support of the other freeholders and copyholders. The brothers had already asked the Commons Preservation Society for assistance. It probably did no more than advise them. The three hundred acres of land, a mixture of freehold and copyhold, acquired from the Byrons included Hayes and Roke Farm bought in 1863 and Old Lodge Farm bought in 1870. William lived at Little Roke House. In 1864 he had transferred some few acres to his younger brother, James, but it was the land included in William's ownership which enabled his and not James's suit to be brought to a conclusion. William, the plaintiff, contested Byron's claim to restrict the rights of both freeholders and copyholders grazing their cattle. Byron, the defendant, claimed that manorial custom only entitled them to graze sheep, not cattle in general, and but one sheep per acre on common land in the immediate vicinity of the farmers' lands and not throughout the whole of the commons. Byron also claimed that such enclosures he had made and intended to make had the blessings of the copyholders involved, thus ensuring he was not guilty of breaking the law. William also claimed that Byron had started excavating marl, loam and gravel for sale to such an extent as to injure the commons and the commoners' rights. William wanted an injunction to prevent such damage as well as forbidding further enclosures.

The successful case of Hall v. Byron was heard before Chancery over nine days in November and December 1876 and judgement given by the Vice-Chancellor Hall in the following January. It was not a clear-cut case because of conflicting legal

precedents and the vast but inconclusive documentation, including the Domesday Book but also some as early as the year 747, that William had filed. There were also complications in that some of the copyhold land had become enfranchised and so had become freehold land. Enfranchisement could be obtained by agreement between the copyholder and the lord of the manor or by taking advantage of legislation as governments had already begun to simplify the law of copyhold long before it was finally abolished. It was also difficult to establish what the manorial customs had been, whether in favour of the tenant or the lord of the manor, and also whether there were established customs that would give prescriptive rights even when not supported by manorial documents or if the customs had been observed at the time William had bought the land. The case turned particularly on William's possession of one parcel of land for which he paid a quit-rent of 5s 10d and where the nature of his ownership was clearly established by title deed. Small wonder that a law professor in the 1880s told his students that copyhold tenure 'still exists, a horrible nuisance, as you will learn at large some day'.

William Hall had a further difficulty. He was not privy to what Byron was planning. He did not know exactly what was or was not enclosed. He alleged that Byron had enclosed fifty acres of Riddlesdown but the Vice Chancellor stated that the allegation was exaggerated. William had a similar difficulty after the injunction was given, for he alleged that Byron had sold common land in Kenley to John Young, who like Byron was a magistrate. William took the matter to court later in 1877 but clearly he had no luck as in 1883 it was still being called an allegation.

The judgement dismissed Byron's restrictive claims. The judgement held that it was only natural that sheep should be customary on the downs because of the nature of the herbage, not because of manorial rights. Byron's claim that the rights of common were limited to the farmers' immediate vicinity was also dismissed. Unfortunately for the plaintiff and the defendant the Vice-Chancellor decided that neither side could claim costs against the other: each had to pay his own. In March 1877 the writ of injunction was issued to prevent Byron from enclosing further common land or destroying the soil to the detriment of the commoners' rights or incur a penalty of £16,000 if he should do so. Seemingly William Hall had won what he had set out to achieve.

But had he? In his petition to the City of London made soon after the injunction, a petition to which I shall come in a moment, William begs the City to take action to 'keep the said space as an open space for ever'. The City Solicitor in his report to the Coal, Corn and Finance Committee in December 1877 refers to William offering the City a legal interest in the soil to render it impossible for the commons to be enclosed. There is also an undated letter from Edmund Byron to Lord Hylton (William George Hylton Jolliffe, whose seat was Merstham House and who was lord of the manor of Merstham) in which he offers Lord Hylton a share, an 'allotment', of Farthing Downs. In that letter, published in the Bourne Society's Bulletin 104 under the heading of 'Proposed Enclosure of Farthing Downs', Byron says he does not expect any opposition from the Halls as they could not legally interfere. It is said in the article that this letter was probably written in 1878 or 1879. What Byron means by 'could not legally interfere' is uncertain; but the letter, which I think might have been written in 1877 soon after the injunction, implies that the injunction was ineffective. Taken together, these pieces of evidence show clearly enough that, despite William winning his suit against Byron, the threat of further enclosures remained.

It seems an example of the saying about winning the battle but losing the war. There are two related explanations. As mentioned above, it was difficult to prove whether a particular piece of land was common land and indeed whether or not it was or was about to be enclosed. The other explanation concerns the expense.

The Vice Chancellor's decision not to award costs had placed William in a predicament. He owed fees to his solicitor he could not pay. Indeed his solicitor was to take him to court. William therefore appealed to the City of London. After all Coulsdon was within twenty five miles of the City. In his petition addressed to the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and the Common Council in July 1878 he offered to sell them a 'sufficient' amount of his land for them to have commoners' rights so that the commons could be protected for ever. Moreover ownership would entail far more than the right to interfere. As in the case of Epping Forest, owning freehold land would enable the City both to prevent further enclosures and to make by-laws and regulations. Donovan Dawe's article states that William was offering to sell one acre of his land for several thousands of pounds. The petition has a slightly different emphasis but perhaps no more than a distinction without a difference. What William wanted and asked for was reimbursement rather than a straightforward sale. He and his brother had spent £3,626 14s 6d in legal costs. He offered,

therefore, to sell the sufficient quantity of land in exchange for £3,000 ‘towards the cost of the suit’.

I infer, therefore, that his experience of going to law had been too costly and too complex for him to risk further legal costs. His experience had put him off going to law again. He now preferred a different route to achieve his aims, in effect by placing himself under the protection of the City of London and the recently passed City of London (Open Spaces) Act mentioned above.

Dawe also states that William’s price was rejected not just once but twice. The Coal, Corn and Finance Committee was unwilling to pay William’s high price neither then nor when he made a second offer, when his price was not much lower. Thus far Dawe was right. The Committee was only willing to buy the land offered for a sum not exceeding £500. So matters stood in the first half of 1882 as the Committee was unwilling to proceed, but then in July the Court of the Common Council of the City instructed the Committee to reconsider William’s offer. Once again members of the Committee went to see the Commons in William’s company.

The Committee may well have been surprised at what happened next. Byron’s steward, Edward Moberly, sent a letter telling the Committee that Byron was willing to sell the Commons at a price of £25 per acre for all of the 350 acres of common land. It now had two offers to consider. The Committee negotiated with Byron for £20 per acre and then raised it to £22. 10s. In December 1882 the decision was made to accept Byron’s offer. William was affronted as not only had his offer been rejected but also his advice on Byron’s offer had not even been sought. All that remained, or so it seemed, was for the deed of conveyance to drawn up and sealed.

So simple it was not to be. Byron had neglected to mention, first, that further enclosures apparently (the allegations probably coming from William) were still being negotiated with John Young and with Lord Hylton; and, second, that the Brighton Railway Company had constructed a tunnel under Riddlesdown. The first had to be clarified by having accurate large scale maps made, the second to ascertain whether or not the railway company intended to acquire the surface above the tunnel, for if it did then it would have to be compensated. Unfortunately the London Metropolitan Archives’ catalogues suggest that the maps have not survived.

In the end the City bought 346 acres for £7,000, 'not much in excess', so it said, of William's price. That included Riddlesdown's 77 acres, Kenley Common's 77 acres, Coulsdon Common's 88 acres and Farthing Downs's 126 acres besides Bradmore, Lion and Lacey Greens. Some common land Byron was able to keep.

It is understandable why William Hall would want to sell his single acre but why Edmund Byron should wish to sell is less so. The explanation must be conjectural. Roger Packham and one or two others have seen the Byron archives held by one of Edmund's granddaughters, Mrs Lucy Butler, but so far as I know they have not been catalogued. Some of the items, probably most, concern her brother, Robert Byron, the author of the noted travel book *The Road to Oxiana*. When the Byron estate was sold in 1922, it was auctioned in lots because none of Edmund Byron's three sons wanted to inherit it. At that auction three farms failed to reach the asking price and were withdrawn from sale. The mansion and its own lands also failed to sell. The underlying cause in the 1880s is the same as in the 1920s. Both were periods of economic depression. The value of land fell. Between the mid-1870s and the mid-1890s the income from agricultural rents in the south-east fell by about forty per cent. Agricultural land was difficult to sell.

Like William Hall, Byron had his own legal costs to recuperate. Moreover he was not unkind. At his funeral, reported one local newspaper, only good things were said about him. Like his father he may have been brusque but not unsympathetic. He could be tight-fisted but also when the occasion demanded generous as he appears to have been a paternalistic squire who, like his father, looked after his tenants and agricultural labourers. As they had also suffered from the economic depression, Byron remitted rents. He also had expensive hobbies. His will testifies to his enthusiasm for, and pride in, hunting, shooting, fishing and steeple chasing. He had been Master of the Old Surrey Hunt and the hounds were kept at Garston Hall, his property. His hobbies were not confined to England as he regularly went abroad to pursue them. The opportunity to sell 'waste land' would have been hard to resist.

The City's decision to buy went against its City Solicitor's advice or at least was contrary to his opinion. His view was that as Coulsdon was so near to the large town of Croydon, its local authority should protect the commons.

We can better appreciate the City of London's commitment to public service by being aware of its other efforts to prevent enclosures and to preserve the commons as open spaces for the public at large to enjoy. While it was negotiating the purchase of Coulsdon Commons, it had just concluded acquiring Epping Forest and was still negotiating the purchase of Burnham Beeches. It was simultaneously looking into the possibility of acquiring other open spaces and was being pressed to preserve Banstead Commons whose fifteen hundred acres were being encroached upon by a Warwickshire baronet, Sir John Hartopp, who had spent £40,000 acquiring the commoners' rights. The City had also purchased St Paul's churchyard to be used as an open space. Only three acres of the City of London's open spaces lie within the City itself.

Finally on May 19, 1883, the Corporation of the City of London took possession of the Commons. A special train left London Bridge for Caterham Junction. From there a state carriage drawn by a pair of horses, took the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress, accompanied by a stage coach with members of the City's Coal, Corn and Finance Committee and by a further twenty five carriages carrying guests, up Caterham valley to Kenley where the dedication of the Commons was held. Among the invited guests were local freeholders, the editor of the Surrey Mirror, the chairman of the Croydon Local Board of Health, the High Sheriff of Surrey, Lord Monson and a former Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary, the splendidly named Viscount Sherbrooke of Sherbrooke in Warlingham, formerly Robert Lowe. Scots Grenadiers and Coldstream Guards from Caterham barracks and a force of police stood by, not that there was much risk of trouble as most of those present were sober and undemonstrative citizens, with only a few labourers attending. There the deed of conveyance was handed to the Lord Mayor, the Rt Hon. Henry Esmond Knight. The Lady Mayoress planted the first of five memorial trees. George Shaw-Lefevre (later Lord Eversley), First Commissioner of Woods and Forests, a government minister, and chairman of the Commons Preservation Society from 1866 till his death in 1928, dedicated the Commons. His speech outlined the progress made over the previous nine years during which time the City had purchased between six and seven thousand acres of common land at a cost of little more than three hundred thousand pounds. In the late afternoon a civic dinner was held at Crystal Palace. Among those invited and observed present, if not in the afternoon at Kenley Common, then at Crystal Palace, was Edmund Byron. What his thoughts were remain unrecorded.

William Hall lived a further five years, dying at the Queen's Hotel in Eastbourne in April 1888 when he was only fifty seven. His home address was still Little Roke House in Kenley. He also had an address in London and he is described as a provision merchant at the time of his death. He was able to bequeath almost exactly the same sum as he had asked from the City of London, so it seems he had a sufficient fortune. That might explain why he dared to take on Edmund Byron whereas other Coulsdon farmers dared not.

William Hall must have grieved over the cruel fate that it was Byron, the man William had taken to court, at a considerable financial loss to himself, in order to prevent Byron from enclosing Coulsdon Commons any further, who had earned plaudits for helping to ensure their survival.

Brian Lancaster

Recollections of Norwood from the early years of Queen Victoria's reign

Brian Lancaster came across this description of the memories of a Norwood resident in the *Croydon Times* of Saturday, June 16, 1923. He has provided this edited version omitting some of the comments of the paper.

RURAL NORWOOD

Reminiscences by Aged Resident

THE OLD SPA GARDENS

Royal Stag Hunts on Beulah Hill

WHEN PRIZE FIGHTS WERE FREQUENT

SPECIAL TO THIS JOURNAL

I remember, I remember
Old Norwood of the past,
The Spa, its chief attraction then,
Drew people of high cast.
There was no Crystal Palace then,
Nor cinemas so gay,
The rural Norwood of that time -
How changed it is today!

There are probably a good many old residents of Norwood who could tell some interesting stories concerning the district's earlier history (and some maybe able to improve on the foregoing travesty of a well-remembered verse), but there is one old inhabitant of Norwood who can lay claim to knowing the district as intimately as anyone, for he was born there eighty-one years ago and has lived there ever since.

MR WILLIAM PRINGLE

A gateway between two large houses on Beulah Hill leads one to "Pringles's Nursery," which comprises 3½ acres of land, and on this land Mr Pringle has worked as a nurseryman all his life.

REMINISCENCES

In reminiscent mood the old gentleman recalled the sights of old Norwood for the benefit of our readers.

"I was born in 1842 at 'The Yews', a few yards from here," he said, "and I started my education at All Saints Schools, Beulah Hill! I can remember often reading the inscriptions on one of the old tombstones in the churchyard, which ran –

Stop, my friend as you pass by,
As you are now so once was I,
As you are, like me must be,
So be prepared to follow me."

USED TO WATCH PRIZE FIGHTS

"My chief diversion as a youngster was to go to the common on which the Crystal Palace high level station now stands. And watch the prize fights which used to take place there. What is now Gypsy Hill was then part of the common and the gypsy caravans used to come in high numbers to encamp there."

It may almost be said that Mr Pringle remembers the Crystal Palace as a pane of glass, for he watched it, when he was 10 years of age, being put together.

"The land on which the Palace stands was a mass of woodland," he said, "and I recall witnessing the great fire a

few years later which burnt down the north part of the building.

"I often used to go down to the old Anerley Gardens, and many is the pleasant day I've spent in them.

THE SPA IN OLDEN TIMES

"Beulah Spa in those days," continued Mr Pringle, reverting to his immediate surroundings, "was a very much frequented spot, and near it was the old blacksmith's forge, also a beer shop where, as a boy, I used to go and play the concertina. The Spa had many attractions in addition to its waters.

There was a menagerie in the grounds, and archery was a popular pastime there, while in the evening firework displays were given, concerts and dancing being regular features.

A little party of us boys, myself with the concertina and another boy with a tambourine, etc, spent many a lively time there entertaining the company. Crowds of people from all parts of London and around travelled to the Spa to take the waters, and many brought jars and bottles which they filled and took back with them. The mineral wells near Biggin Hill also drew many visitors."

SIMS REEVES AS A NEIGHBOUR

Mr Pringle in his time had some distinguished neighbours, including Sims Reeves, the famous tenor singer, who lived next door to him. Reeves always sent the old gentleman tickets for his concerts, and often visited the nursery.

Admirers of the great tenor must have envied Mr Pringle, for he often used to hear his neighbour singing in the garden.

Years ago, when the Beulah Hill district and London generally had far fewer buildings, it was easily possible to discern the

grand stand at Epsom Downs on a fine day, and in the other direction from Pringle's Nursery, one could have an uninterrupted view of Big Ben at Westminster.

COULD HEAR "BIG BEN"

"Big Ben could be distinctly heard chiming at that time there was not sufficient noise to drown the sound," remarked Mr Pringle, "and my mother regularly timed our clock by it".

"Looking across to Epsom on a race day, I've seen the carrier pigeons fly past with the result of the races attached to them. They had no telephone, telegraphs or wireless in those days!"

Nor did they have the swift running trains then that the present generation knows; they had to be content with slow engines and open trucks to travel in.

A ROYAL STAG HUNT

One of the most interesting of the old gentleman's reminiscences, by the way, is his recollection of King Edward, then Prince of Wales, stag-hunting across his own land, then owned by Mr Pringle's father.

How many people would recall such an incident, of royalty hunting on their ground, with pride – this interesting old gentleman does, and he will also relate witnessing the kill, with the Prince, on his land.

GARIBALDI

Also he recollects Garibaldi riding through Beulah Hill on his way to the Crystal Palace, and Mr Pringle's father was one of many other admirers who threw flowers into the great Italian leader's carriage.

STILL A GOOD RIFLEMAN

Although he is 81 years of age, Mr Pringle has a wonderfully steady hand, and he is as good a marksman with a rifle to-day as he was when he served in the 20th and 4th Surrey rifle Volunteers as a young man. He is a teetotaller and a non-smoker.

SOME OF HIS VIEWS

Though the old gentleman finds little time to read or discuss political questions, he is a staunch Conservative and loyally upholds the Constitution. Here are some samples of his opinions –

“I don’t hold with trade unions,” he declares, “they are a lot of humbug! What I say is, pay a man according to his ability. I’ve been a nurseryman all my life, and I’m a working man just like anyone. You hear of all these strikes – why should there be strikes? They don’t do the country any good, that’s the way I look on it.”

UP AT FIVE IN THE MORNING

Old Mr Pringle’s claim to be a working man is fully upheld by the fact that even at his age he regularly gets up at five o’clock in the morning, and after a thoroughly hard day’s work, he retires to rest at 9p.m.

When he finishes his breakfast he indulges in a little concertina music with his only daughter for an audience.

ONLY ONCE ON A MOTOR ‘BUS

As previously stated, the old gentleman is somewhat of a recluse.

He has only been on a motor ‘bus once in his life, and he would not have gone then but for the fact that he had to pay an unwilling visit to his dentist!

The last time he left his grounds was last June, and on that occasion he went no further than the main road a few yards from his house. Mr Pringle loves his work, and there is no place like Norwood for him – the rest of the world does not trouble him.

The only thing that does trouble him is his back, and when he thinks of that he is reminded of the fact that he is not so young as he used to be, and that Norwood is no longer the rural retreat that it was.

[From the *Croydon Times* of Saturday, June 16, 1923. No copyright in this article is claimed.]

Another item from the *Croydon Times*

Also in the issue of Saturday, June 16, 1923 an article by Edward A. Martin, on the natural history of Croydon, includes the extract below about birds that Mr Ward Adeney knew had bred regularly in the neighbourhood of Thornton Heath, in the fields between Norbury and Thornton Heath, up to 1894.

Blackbird	Nightingale
Blackcap	Partridge
Bullfinch	Pied Wagtail
Carrion Crow	Redbacked Shrike
Chaffinch	Robin
Chiffchaff	Rook
Cole Tit	Skylark
Cuckoo	Starling
Garden Warbler	Stonechat
Great Tit	Swallow
Greenfinch	Swift
Green Woodpecker	Tomtit
Hedge Sparrow	Tree Pipit
House Martin	Turtle Dove
House Sparrow	Whitethroat
Jay	Willow Wren
Lesser Whitethroat	Woodpigeon
Linnet	Wren
Missel Thrush	Yellowhammer
Moorhen	

Other birds which had been observed were Redwing, Fieldfare. Lapwing, Kestrel, Kingfisher on lake in Norbury Park, Sandpiper similarly, Gull on Selhurst farm, in severe weather, one Brambling caught in a clap-net in Pollard's Hill, Goldfinch, Jackdaws which used to nest in Bensham-lane, Nightjar in Grange Wood and once in Norbury Fields, Long-tailed tit in Woodville Road and Beulah Road, Grasshopper Warbler near Norbury Fields in 1890 and Wheatear.

Edward A. Martin, F.G.S. was a President of our Society and the author of books including *Croydon: New and Old*, with sections on *Ecclesiastical Croydon* and *Round about Greater Croydon* by J. E. Morris, B.A.. It was No. 7 in the series of the Homeland Association's

Handbooks, price sixpence and was published by Roffey and Clark, 12 High Street, Croydon and The St. Bride's Press, Ltd, 24 Bride Lane, Fleet Street, E.C. (Official Publishers to the Homeland Association). Second edition, revised, 1900.

News and Notices

Membership Secretary

There is no longer an acting membership secretary as Dr Jane McLauchlin has agreed to be Membership Secretary.

Correspondence about membership and subscriptions should be sent to her at 96A Brighton Road, South Croydon, CR2 6AD. She can still be contacted by telephone: her number is on the back of the Programme.

Other positions

Members are reminded that the positions of Bulletin Editor and Museum Curator will need to be filled at or before the Annual General meeting in April 2009.

Focus on Urban Wildlife

Following last year's Focus on Downland, this year's theme will cover different forms of wildlife found in urban environments. The three speakers are local. John Birkett of the Croydon Branch of the RSPB and author of a book about a hundred years of Croydon's birds will talk about birds, Maureen Pembridge of the East Surrey Badger Protection Society will talk about badgers and Roy Vickery, chairman of the South London Botanical Institute, will talk about plants. Last year we had four speakers but that left little time for questions from the audience. As before there is no entry fee but there will be tea provided.

20 Southbridge Road

One of Croydon's historic buildings has just been demolished and is being replaced by a modern building. 20 Southbridge Road is on the corner of Southbridge Place which leads uphill to the Waldrons. Opposite, in one direction, is St Andrew's parish church and in another Croydon's fire station. Until a few years ago 20 Southbridge Road was the Croydon Music Teachers' Centre. Older residents may

remember part of it being a baker's shop. It looked an undistinguished building of no architectural interest which is presumably why it has never been locally listed.

Yet it was a historic building. It was a cottage built in the early 1830s by William Trask, a butler, and between 1838 and 1841 he allowed Roman Catholics to use it as a place of worship. What makes the building of historic interest is that it was the place where Roman Catholics could worship in Croydon for the first time since the reign of Elizabeth I.

Roman Catholics were not welcome in Croydon. The *Surrey Standard*, the local newspaper, for 2 January 1836 carried the comment that it 'is a remarkable fact that in Croydon, a town containing above 9,000 inhabitants and within fourteen miles of the metropolis, not even one Papist can be found. We most devoutly wish that every town, village, district and city in the united empire could make the same boast.'

On 30 March 1839 the same paper, now absorbed by the *Sussex Agricultural Express*, reported that 'the late solemnisation of the rites and ceremonies' of the Roman Catholic chapel [at 20 Southbridge Road] had caused concern 'lest any of the inhabitants of this place should become Roman Catholics.' At that time, almost opposite in more than one sense, there was a Baptist chapel in Pump Pail. The Roman Catholics made uncomfortable neighbours and no doubt the Baptists showed their displeasure sufficiently strongly for the Roman Catholic congregation to move to its first permanent place of worship, St Mary's Chapel, in Handcroft Road in 1841.

Incidentally William Trask, the son, described as a 'young and unassuming' artist, produced two lithographed prints of the chapel of Croydon Palace, and also another illustration of the choir drawn on stone, all three being produced in 1846. The artist does not appear to have been a Roman Catholic as the drawings were dedicated to Vicars of Croydon. The prints are now in the Croydon Local Studies Library.

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