

Penhill at Sidcup

Notes about the house taken from the book 'Frederick Matthias Alexander – A Family History' by J.A. Evans

Purchase of Penhill by F.M. Alexander (of the Alexander Technique) in 1925.

F.M. Alexander bought a house at Penhill which, although in the parish of Bexley, was only a mile from Sidcup station. Penhill was originally part of the Lamorbey Estate. This estate comprised a large mansion house with adjoining parkland and woodlands, Pen Farm, other properties, arable land and orchards and was in total some 286 acres. After the death of William Steele the estate was divided into six areas and sold at auction in May 1761. Lot 3 contained Pen Farm, barns, stables, yards, dog kennels and a substantial acreage of land. By the time of the national valuation survey conducted between 1910 and 1915, Pen Farm had reduced significantly in size. The property comprised Penhill House, a cottage, stables with adjacent gardens and outbuildings and 19 acres of farmland and was valued at approximately £3,000. The house was a substantial family home with two drawing rooms, a smoking room, a lobby hall and kitchens downstairs, five bedrooms and a dressing room on the first floor and four servants' bedrooms on the second floor. This property met F M Alexander's requirements and he bought it from the Emmets on 25 March 1925.

Sale of Penhill in 1955

“By now it was clear to F.M. Alexander just how much the South African case had cost him in monetary terms. He had never been wealthy but now he was in a difficult financial situation and he decided that he had no option but to sell Penhill and try to buy a smaller property.”

Unfortunately this was to prove a long and tedious business. The Kent County Council had imposed a restriction on his land as they wished to use it for educational purposes. This meant that Alexander could not sell his property so, early in 1949, he instructed a lawyer in the City of London, to take up the case on his behalf. The fight continued for most of the rest of his life. The Council rejected Alexander's

development proposals and eventually on 7 July 1953 an inquiry was held. His Member of Parliament, Miss Pat Hornsby Smith, raised the problem with the Minister of Housing and Local Government but the appeal was rejected. Alexander believed that the Council had stolen his property as he had had at least two offers for his land, one for £500 an acre and the other for £1,000 an acre provided that the redevelopment was approved; as it was he could do nothing. The correspondence was lengthy and, eventually, Alexander agreed to accept compensation for his loss of right. The development embargo did not include the house, the cottage or the 3 ½ acres of gardens, stables and cowsheds. These, with the exception of the cottage which Alexander retained, were placed on the market for sale.

Penhill was finally sold for redevelopment on 18th March 1955 and all the furniture was auctioned and achieved a good price.

Footnote:

The money from the sale considerably helped Alexander's beleaguered financial position. Although he continued teaching for the next eight months and was in a generally good state of health, in late September, after a visit to the races, he caught a cold. He died peacefully in London on 10 October 1955.