

## Sidcup Place

**Sidcup Place does not seem to have received its present name until 1844 but tradition says that it was built in 1743 and this is probably correct.**

This large grass site with mature trees runs southward from the Sidcup War Memorial, opposite Sidcup Manor, to the north side of Queen Mary's Hospital. The recently restored Red Lodge (built c. 1896) on Chislehurst Road marks Sidcup Place's north western border. There is extensive parkland to the south east.

It is believed that an "officer of engineers" constructed the first part of the building in the shape of a 'star fort with angle bastions' and parts of 2 of these bastions - less than eight feet wide - may still be seen (one of them is still complete). Their position is responsible for the peculiar shape of the older (south-east) part of the house, both inside and outside.

The name of the earliest owner is not known but in 1780 the property was owned by Stephen Remnant and was occupied by Tyron Cotton. After that, the list of owners and occupiers is virtually complete.

Living in a 'star fort' must have had its problems - light, and the size and shape of the rooms, for instance - and it would not be surprising if additions and alterations were soon made: the first of these would have been to the west ('back') or north (the colonnaded wing, which contains some old kitchens). Stephen Remnant owned Sidcup Place until 1822 when it was sold to Henry Berens and the property remained in the Berens family hands for the next 97 years. Again, Henry no doubt made additions and alterations when he took over: certainly the house filled approximately the outlines of its present site by 1844, though there was subsequent rebuilding - notably those of 1853 when Henry Berens' nephew, Henry Hulse Berens, had taken over ownership. It is to him that we surely owe the interior staircase - the fort probably had spiral stairs - and certainly the room behind it, together with the exterior on that side. Later members of the Berens family were responsible for the tower and also for building 'Red Lodge' in the same style; all this probably in the 1890's, by which time the house was probably being rented to tenants, a practice which ceased in 1903.

After this date it stood empty for some time but was then leased to Sidcup Hall College (an amalgamation of two local schools) from 1907. Sidcup Hall remained until 1916, when the establishment moved to Bickley Hall. The property was again empty but in 1917 Rev. J.W. Blencowe (who had served as Field Chaplain in Gallipoli and was later buried alive in France) was appointed as Chaplain to the newly-opened Queen Mary's Hospital. Plans to develop part of the 'estate' in 1915 having come to nothing, he was able to buy a rather dilapidated Sidcup Place in 1919 and having partially renovated it, opened it as a boarding preparatory school for boys. The Sidcup Hall headmaster (Mr Farnfield) had built a gymnasium and some classrooms and Mr Blencowe continued this policy, adding a chapel (removed in 1933), a new dining hall (later part of the Council Chamber), and more dormitories, etc. The school was a very happy one - tennis, golf, cricket, soccer and rugby were among the activities as well as debating and optional gardening but by the 1930s the school was in danger of losing its valuable seclusion and Mr Blencowe decided to remove it to East Grinstead. He accordingly sold the property (25 acres) to a building developer in 1933. However, this was the time when the former Sidcup Urban District Council and its neighbour at Chislehurst were planning to amalgamate. They accordingly acted speedily, obtained a loan and persuaded the builder to re-sell to the combined Council. After some Council discussions on future use, the grounds were opened to the public on Whit-Saturday 19 May, 1934, while the house was used as headquarters for the combined Chislehurst and Sidcup Urban District Council. The Council met in the old gymnasium at first but by demolishing an internal wall between the 'old' dining room (later used as dormitory) and the newer dining hall (built in 1924) one large room was created and was then used as the Council Chamber.

The various rooms have had many uses in their times. For example, when occupied by the Council, the Members' Room was Mr Blencowe's drawing room after his marriage and was little altered from 1743 to 1853. Next to it, even less altered, was the old Headmaster's Study. Rooms over this part of the building were at one time used as a powder closet for the powdering of wigs. The Council Chairman's Room, previously the Headmaster's Dining Room, was part of the 1853 rebuilding as was the first part of the Council Chamber next door. Above these rooms during the school occupation period were the Blue and Red dormitories. Outside, the former stable

block used to have a belfry but this was destroyed by fire in 1928 when the premises were used as a Common Room and bedroom for the masters. The third side of the yard used to be flanked by the chapel but this was removed to East Grinstead in 1933.

Externally, the extensive grounds include the large parkland area stretching eastwards beyond the still visible flint 'ha-ha' wall (which was used to keep animals away from the house) at the time providing unrivalled views across the Cray Valley. Closer to the house, the original walled garden is now maintained by volunteers and the four hard surface tennis courts are still in use. To the east, the present children's playground was built on the site of an ice house.

The recent occupation of Sidcup Place has been as a large 'Brewer's Fayre' pub/restaurant but it reopened after refurbishment in early 2018 as 'The Star at Sidcup Place' operated by Marston's. Although difficult to identify with their previous use, the many ground floor rooms are today in use as individual bars and eating areas. The large staircase, in the Jacobean style with heavy wooden balusters and newels, can be seen rising from the ground floor hall, with a Rococo style fireplace, to the first floor, past the large stained glass window dating from 1933. Many of the first floor rooms are available as meeting rooms.