

## Sidcup

**Sidcup is often chosen as an example of the typical London 1930s suburb.**

However this ignores the fact that the area has a long and interesting history with the earliest references to the area occurring in the thirteenth century, during the reign of Henry III. The area was probably settled long before this and indeed the word Sidcup is derived from the Anglo-Saxon words 'SET' (meaning fold or flat) and COPP (meaning a hill top). So Sidcup meant something like 'a fold in the hill' or 'flat hill top'.

Although there has been a settlement at Sidcup since 1254, the small hamlet was properly established by the late 1600s sandwiched between the older villages of Fooks Cray and Halfway Street. It grew slowly throughout the next two centuries to become a cluster of houses around Black Horse Inn, which was established in about 1692, and the forge at the top of what is now Sidcup Hill. The Black Horse is now The Learning and Enterprise College Bexley, housed in the redeveloped Travelodge Hotel. The Ye Olde Black Horse pub in Halfway Street is in fact younger than the one which was in the High Street by about 100 years!

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the area became very popular with the landed gentry and a number of substantial houses were built including Fooks Cray Place (1754), Frognal (c.1670), Sidcup Place (1743) and Lamorbey (1744). Fooks Cray Place was of particular importance as it was the home of the onetime Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nicholas Vansittart, Lord Bexley, between 1822 and 1850. The house burnt down in 1949 but the foundations and some of what remains of the gardens are still visible in Fooks Cray Meadows, near All Saints Church.

The Hollies, now a private housing estate, was originally an old estate with a mansion called Marrowbone Hall. The new house and its outbuildings, built in 1853, were subsequently bought by the Greenwich and Deptford Board of Guardians in 1902 and turned into the Hollies children's home and school, which was planned to be "a model home for orphans". The homes were in a rural setting and were arranged as "cottages" around a main building (the former

Hollies house) and each cottage had a “family” of about 15 children in it looked after by a member of staff. This sort of approach was very different to the large urban institutions that had previously been used as children's homes.

Another house still surviving in the area and built in about 1790 is Sidcup Manor House on The Green that has been the registry office for births, marriages and deaths since 1993. It has been known as the Manor House since about 1870 when the occupiers were the Misses Hoare and has had many uses including a school, nursing home and after 1950, council offices.

### **Victorian Sidcup**

By the mid-nineteenth century the centre of Sidcup was beginning to move from the area around the Black Horse west along the High Street towards the junction with Station Road. The building of a chapel of ease (which later became St Johns Church) in this area in 1844 may have encouraged this move but it is more likely that the partitioning of the land as part of the Tithe Award for Chislehurst in 1843 made development fully possible. The church was built after pressure from three prominent local residents who didn't want to have to travel to Chislehurst to go to church. These were Lord Bexley of Fooks Cray Place, Henry Berens of Sidcup Place and Viscount Sydney of Frogna. At the time Berens owned most of the land between Sidcup Place and the High Street and it was he who provided money to finish the building of the church when funds were running low. Berens bought Sidcup Place in 1822 and was succeeded in residence by his nephew, also called Henry Berens. The family were great supporters of Sidcup and responsible for the founding of many facilities for local residents including the church, a school and also Ursula Lodges on Sidcup Hill which, when they were built, were ‘for the residence of six maiden ladies, not under the age of 45!’ It was in this way, through the support of wealthy local families, that Sidcup gradually grew to prominence during the Victorian period.

By 1862 the area of the High Street between The Black Horse and the junction with Station Road boasted a police station, opened in 1845 and some terraced housing in Church Place. The Kent Directory for 1858 also lists a grocer, wood dealer, shoemaker, beer retailer, blacksmith, tailor and carpenter amongst the shops in Sidcup.

However, as in many places throughout the country, it was the coming of the railway to Sidcup in September 1866 as part of the Dartford Loop Line that really stimulated the growth of the area. The station was built some distance to the north west of Sidcup near to the hamlet of Lamorbey perhaps because of the importance of Lamorbey House but more likely because the location was the most direct route between other stations on the same line. It also avoided the higher ground around Sidcup itself and so the location was "a compromise between accessibility and the most direct route". The Station Hotel was opened in July 1879 to help accommodate the influx of visitors to the town. The building of the railway did lead to a dramatic increase in the population of the town from 390 in 1871 to 8493 in 1911 with landowners dividing up their land and selling it off to developers as building plots for housing as people were now able to commute to London to work.

In tandem with house building came the development of local amenities and services. Gas lighting arrived in 1882, mains drainage in 1883, followed by electricity in the early 1900s. 1882 seems to have been a key date for the area with the cottage hospital in Birkbeck Road, Sidcup National School and the second St Johns Church all built in that year (the present church was built in 1901).

### **1930s**

Soon after this, in the late 1920s and early 1930s came the massive suburban development so typical of Sidcup today. Developers such as New Ideal Homesteads Ltd moved in to buy up large areas of land, which had formerly been part of the great estates of the area. These were then sub-divided into plots and road upon road of affordable good quality housing was built to cater for the middle class commuters wanting to move out of London in search of a better quality of life in more 'rural' locations. This was particularly true of the area north of the traditional heart of Sidcup around the High Street as the development engulfed Lamorbey and surged northwards towards Blackfen. Typical of this type of development was the Penhill Park Estate around where Penhill Road now is. In 1933 you could buy a three bedroomed semi-detached house with 'large gardens front and back' on this estate for £395 freehold!

The saturation of the area with housing was of course to have ominous consequences with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

Sidcup was right on the route of the German bombers and rockets as they flew towards central London and as a result the area suffered extensive damage during the war, particularly in 1944 from V1 and V2 rockets. The Sidcup area today is very much a product of the extensive building during the 1930s but some historic buildings do still survive to give a hint of the earlier history of the area.