

## **Downham Estate - Its Origins and History from the Cubs of Downham's Original Pride**

The late Norman Smith, who resided in Rangefield Road, had the inspiration to form the Downham Reminiscence Group during one of his periods in office as Mayor of Lewisham. This coincided with Downham's official Diamond (60 years) Anniversary in 1986.

"We wish to thank the Borough of Lewisham for allowing us to have the use of Downham Library each first and third Tuesday of the month to continue Downham Memories which the late Arthur Andrews and his wife Vera, nee Wallis, guided us through from 1988 to 1998; having taken on the task from Mr Mel Wright; 1986 - 1988. Naturally, our thanks go to all who have supported us with their photographs and memories".

This website is dedicated to the memory of the Downham Originals and particularly Mrs Queenie Mortimer, who died in 2010, who was the driving force behind the development of the Downham Originals website and the publication of a book on the subject.

The Goldsmiths Community Centre, which helped Queenie and her colleagues develop the website, now hosts these extracts from Downham Originals. Sadly, we no longer have access to the photographs and documents from the original website.

A lively discussion group about Downham, and memories of people who live and lived there can be found on the Downham Online website.

### **History**

Pre Neolithic Times Southend Pond to Bromley Hill –Wild animals made a pathway through the forests and dense undergrowth alongside the River Ravensbourne. This rises at Keston and meanders to its end at Deptford Creek, where, along with the various other tributaries it joins the River Thames

Neolithic Signs of settlements, including migrant tribes from Europe, used the beasts pathways, now called Holloway's, whilst hunting for food or visiting/raiding other settlements

Romans Created more solid paths

Saxons Allowed these roads to become overgrown once again

Normans Travel by horse, donkey or any other beast of burden- Bromley Hill to Southend Village, now forms part of the Manor Of Shroffold - 1087

1450 Jack Cade, Irish rebel, leader of the Kentish Uprising. Jack Cade's island; where he hid for a while; still in the centre of Southend Pond or lake

1601 Horsedrawn coaches-this meant Footpads, Highwaymen, etc

1700s Earl of Northbrook, Lord of the Manor of Shroffold, now also owns Holloway Farm, which reaches the Gatehouse of Bromley Place (McDonalds and Bromley Court Hotel). The latter having been Baron Farnborough's Seat – the road now named Holloway.

1770 Sketch of Southend Village at the British Museum in London

1800s Mail coaches, Wagons carrying fruit and vegetables from roughly Sevenoaks to London stopping for a few hours at either of the two hostelries The Green Man or the Tigers Head. The village now has 40 homes.

As time passed many water mills were created along the river Ravensbourne, also The Pathway was much closer to the river at the time. The first one or Upper Mill was originally used for corn; many years later, roughly the 1800s, it became Perry's Farm. The Lower mill, also used at one time for grinding corn into flour, had the use of the Pond adjoining it. Just one small building remains of this, at the corner of Bromley Road and Southend Lane. It was during the 1800s again when the new owner changed from cutlery to corn and mustard to grinding, a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum shows a fine display of the craftsmanship of Ephraim How and his son John. Their house stood on the site of The Tigers Head.

1824 Major John Forster grandfather of Lord Forster had the Chapel built for his family and the villagers. The Forster family had become the largest landowners in the Lewisham area. This lasted for around 200 years.

1834 Major John Forster died aged 82 years

1855 Village School opened; another of Forster's ideals achieved

1866 Lord Forster born at Flower House (Hall); named after Mr Flower. Whilst still a boy, Forster visited Mr Renshaw at Southend Hall, which was the Family seat, or at least one of them. It later became The Studio Club. Samuel Forster had the Lower Mill rebuilt.

1882 Mr Jacob Perry arrived from Hayward's Heath to farm at the Upper Mill, and whose name lives on in Perry's Farm. This gentleman created his own generator for electricity, whereby he illuminated his farm for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. He was buried as a pauper at Hither Green cemetery.

1889 Lewisham becomes a Metropolitan Borough; the boundary of Kent moved to the lower part of Bromley Hill.

### **1892-1924**

1892 Trains via Catford; Bellingham, through to Shortlands and Bromley from London didn't bring any changes to the Village or along the road to Bromley Hill, which was still practically a lane. And of course there was Holloway Farm each side of the road, or lane, whilst up Whitefoot Lane or as Farmer Perry named it Gypsy Hill there was Shroffold Farm.

1900-1914 The area from Southend Village to Bromley Hill, very little change. Still water cress beds between Upper Mill (Perry's Farm) and Lower Mill. Horse drawn wagons and buses, the latter to become motorised by

1914. Perry's Farm, straddling both sides of Bromley Road, though a few houses were erected by 1900, almost opposite Mr Perry's home (there are still about four there today). Jacob Perry opened a farm each summer on the opposite side of his home to hold The Hospital Fair; one had to pay an entrance fee because the cash was for The Hospital Welfare Society. These occasions continued well into the 1930s, even when their venue was moved to Old Bromley Road to make way for the building of The Splendid Cinema. Back in 1930, the Fair was opened by Princess Louise, one of Queen Victoria's descendants.

1913 Underground electrically driven Trams now reach Southend Village from London

1914 Lord Forster left Southend Hall, which was purchased by Britannia Film Company around August 17th 1914.

1919 Lord Forster gave part of his estate to the borough of Lewisham to create a park in memory of his two sons killed in the Great War; hence Forster Memorial Park; their names were Alfred and John.

1920 Shroffold Farm and Holloway Farm purchased by the London County Council.

1923/24 Major Patrick-a-Becket and Maxwell opened Southend Pond as Peter Pans Pool.

#### Estate History

Holland Hannen and Cubitt begin the birth of Downham Estate named to commemorate the Chairman of the L.C.C. Lord Downham. The Estate was finished on March 1 1930; its Superintendent was Major Lambert. There were now about twelve private houses built at the Bromley Hill end of Bromley Road.

Studio Club - Taylor Walker Brewers of East London, purchased the vacant property of Warner Film Studios (erected on the site of Southend Hall) to create a Working Men's Club, which opened in October of 1924. This stood on the corner of Whitefoot Lane and Bromley Road, opposite what was Courts. Naturally when Southend and Whitefoot Lanes were straightened and widened the building was demolished and their new premises erected in Old Bromley Road at the beginning of 1939.

1925- Many families now in residence I have been told that all the heads of the households were in full employment, (if you could call waiting at Surrey Docks to be called for your labour regular work; and bearing in mind that 1926 brought the General Strike.). April 1925 saw the opening of Rangefield Road School, even though many classrooms were not finished in the first week, on the Monday there were 35 pupils, and by the Friday 61. The ages ranged from 3 to 13 years of age. The staff consisted of one head teacher, and three assistants. The school was opened officially November 24 at 7.30. December 3, saw the opening of the first shop on Bromley Hill; it was a chemists. These stores addresses were Ashgrove Parade, until after the Second World War.

July 1926 Lord Forster laid the foundation stone for Saint Johns Church; this was to replace the Village Church, i.e. The Forster Chapel. The number 54 tram now running as far as Valeswood Road. September 28th.

1927 Downderry School opened. Vehicles now using New Bromley Road, this name stayed until WW2 or at least just after. Meanwhile, Bromley Road or as it is now named Old Bromley Road, still in use re cyclists, horse driven carts, especially tip up carts generally full of refuse, for land fill on the area where Brangbourne Road is built and the Recreation Park, which is part of Beckenham Place Park, and of course The New Studio Club.

Feb King George V and Queen Mary, unlocked number 165 Downham Way

May 2nd Lord Forster gave land in Old Bromley Road for a British Legion Working Men's Club, opened officially by him July 1929--Demolished 1999

July Salvation Army adjoining the British Legion opened.--Demolished 1980

Southend Village Police Station {the Limes and the Elms} at Bromley Road opened. This was roughly where Courts Furnishing Store now stands.

1928 New Bromley Road now in full use, and trams reaching the terminus at Grove Park. This was November 15th, whilst Thomas Tilling still continued the omnibus service to Bromley and on to Farnborough from Shoreditch. St Johns church consecrated. Vicar, Rev Edge Partington. Downderry School officially opened.

1929 St Barnabas church erected Downham Way. All shops now in use.

Good Shepherd temporary church in Moorside Road. Beckenham Place Park opened. This was only the far side of the railway line where the Golf course is with the entrance, as now via the Lodge gates in Beckenham Hill.

1938-45

1938---A.R.P - Air Raid Precaution Wardens being enrolled

A.F.S. - Auxiliary Fire Service formed. This Service as with the above included males as well as females. Anderson Shelters were starting to be delivered. These were designed by Dr David Anderson-- each one consisted of 14 sheets of corrugated iron, forming a shell, which stood 6ft. Each owner had the task of digging a hole 4ft deep, and then to cover the top with earth or, as many did sandbags.

1938/9 Identity Cards and Gas masks issued (both to always be carried by you). Public Air Raid Shelters being built;i.e.2 on either side of The Change over, on the greens as well as on the fields in Old Bromley Road.( where the flats now stand),plus ARP Stations built, generally alongside a Telephone Box. I recall the erection of a siren alongside the Police Box, just past Bromley Hill Cemetery.

1939--The New Studio Club now erected and opened in Old Bromley Road.

April 5th Plans for Evacuation of Schools in progress.

Sept 1st. Teachers and schoolchildren leaving Downham (it was a Friday).

Sept 3rd. War declared. Gummed paper on windows, dark or at least very thick curtains re The Blackout. Places of entertainment, i.e. cinemas theatres etc. closed. The next few months classed as the phoney war, hence many children returned home to Downham. Places of entertainment reopened.

1939 November19th. The new Police station opened at 333 Bromley Road Catford

1940.-January beginning of Food Rationing register at the local shops i.e. Butchers Grocers, Dairy etc. Barrage Balloons, Train mounted Anti Aircraft Guns on the Catford to Bromley railway line, in the Beckenham Place Park stretch of line.

September-to mid 1941 London Blitz. Some children once more evacuated though further afield this time. The Green Man, Splendid Cinema Bromley Court Hotel, hit along with several houses. Mainly Incendiary bombs. The estate had many houses and air raid shelters hit with the inevitable loss of life and resulting injuries. Sadly as the years dragged on there was to be much more carnage and damage re; Landmines Unexploded bombs Molotov Cocktails and High explosive bombs. June - Clothes rationing. Schools, places of Worship etc. taken for First Aid Posts A.R.P., A.F.S. and of course Heavy Rescue. Males and females conscripted into the armed services, Land Army and Munitions along with many other essential jobs. Basically the 1940s was a period of, what is still standing or at least still usable. At least a few prefabricated homes were being erected. Trams and buses now had antisplinter windows installed

1942 Downham Nursery opened October 26th at 163 Shroffold Road.

1944-July 13th Direct hit by V1. Rocket (Doodlebug) on the Tigers Head. 18 people were killed and 40 injured. This was just one of about 8 to rain down on Southend Lane, Bromley Road and Southend Village. August 2nd a direct hit by a Doodlebug on 27 Durham Hill (now named Cinderfoot)

Prisoner of War Camp based at the Ravensbourne Foxgrove Road side of Beckenham Place Park

### **1945-60**

1946 Prefabs now available to the fortunate few.

1948-August 15th British Legion Gardens of Remembrance, either side of the lower end of Downham Way. Abandoned by 1960.

Electricity now installed in the majority of homes

Flats arising in Old Bromley Road in place of the now obsolete Public Air Raid Shelters

NEW Downham Estate extension being built on the left hand side of Bromley Hill between Sandpit Road and Glenbow Road originally the area of allotments and sandpits.

1951-August Queen Elizabeth {The late Queen Mother} visited Mr and Mrs T. Warrington at Pontefract Road Downham, also had tea with Mr and Mrs Doran of 70 Blacklands Road Southend Village re The London Gardens Society

Flats being erected on the site of the old Flower House

Bomb damaged premises under repair (remember this was still the period of Austerity and Rationing)

1952 -We saw the final use of the Trams, now we had buses.

1953-The two cottages which stood at the corner of Ashgrove Road and Old Bromley Road, demolished and The Garden Gate public house built (now McDonalds). Courage's were the Brewers.

The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth 2nd. Television now finding its way into many homes

1955-February 33,000 people now packed into the London County Councils Compact Downham Estate. Three families sometimes in one house re the Blitzing of London when friends and family gathered together for shelter and waiting to be rehoused. Most unable to afford furnished accommodation, which was privately owned.

1958-September 8th Malory Comprehensive School Launcelot Road opened this once was the site where in the early 1920s or rather around 1925 one could pay 5 shillings for a short flight on Saturday afternoons, covering the fields, Bromley Court Hotel, and return over Sundridge Park landing back at roughly Grove Park. These trips were undertaken by Surrey Flying Services from Croydon Aerodrome.

1960 Individual shops closing with the introduction of self service shops and pre-packaging

### **1960 – 2002**

1963-December 10th St Johns C of E primary school rebuilt at Whitefoot Lane opened. Old school taken for the use of Age Concern

The Forster Chapel now used as a private nursery/kindergarten.

1965 April 1st London County Council becomes Greater London Council

The entry into the County of Kent is no longer at the boundary of Lewisham/Bromley

1981 Peter Pans Pool {Southend Pond} now Homebase

1983 The old Southend Village School demolished

1986 June 27th/29th Downham's 60th anniversary Festival held at the Bromley Road end of the Playing Fields, with another entry in Glenbow Road (These fields run parallel to Downham Way at this point)

1988 June 26th Downham Fun Day, also the launch of our first book that is the Downham Reminiscence Group.

1991 June 23rd Fun day. (This also held like the two previous ones at the Playing Field)

1994 June 25th Downham Carnival. The procession traversed Dowlerry Rd, Winlaton Rd, and several others eventually entering the Bromley Rd. On leaving the local shops it climbed Downham Way to Northover, finally turning into Whitefoot Lane and back to base. (Our group had the pleasure of using a Wartime Bus, but bearing in mind that it was a very warm day, hopping off and on the bus collecting cash was very tiring Good job that the vehicle was only able to travel at a snails pace. (The Money collected was to purchase a Community Bus)

1997 Downham Central School demolished. After WW2. It had become Lewisham College for overseas students etc. There are now several private houses there

2002 Downham Swimming Baths and Library Due to be demolished this year to make way for a new Health and Leisure Centre

Francis Chappell, the Local undertakers is the only original shop? They very kindly donated a community coach for small groups, supplying their own driver.

The only other original building or rather trade is that of what was the Midland Bank which is at the present time the HSBC. The building having been extended.

### **Estate Homes**

Holloway Farm and Shroffold Farm (522 acres) were put up for sale originally in 1910. Lewisham and Deptford were not interested in them at that time.

By 1917 the severe housing shortage in London had started causing the government a few headaches; much more so by the end of WW1, when the men returned looking for Homes Fit For Heroes.

In 1920 London County Council made a compulsory purchase of the farms.

Building commenced in March 1924, with at least three trains bringing building materials from Ravensbourne station originally and later using Grove Park. Their names were, Hollandcube, Shroffold and Downham.

The earliest cottages erected have the familiar red bricks at the front of the building, whilst at the rear or back the bricks are yellow, these came from war damaged buildings in Belgium.

The total number of homes was as follows - 6,071:

#### Houses

729 have 5 rooms-parlour type

1,559 4 rooms- parlour type

1,311 have 4 rooms non parlour type

2,060 have 3 rooms non parlour type

#### Flats

64 have 4 rooms

128 have 3 rooms

216 have 2 rooms

The cost £3,575,000

The numbers housed were 29,000. 5,816 children.

10% of these abodes were allocated to Bermondsey and Deptford. Bermondsey paid £4/10s for 40 years in respect of the accommodation.

Rents were as follows

12s 1d to 14s for 2 room flats

17s 9d to 21s 5d for 5 room cottages

10s 6d for 3 room cottages this had 3s added for rates i.e. water.

All the properties had the rates added on as above.

There were 17 cottages erected to the acre; all had a scullery (kitchen) with a fired copper, not just for boiling the washing, but also to heat the bath water which was then pumped by hand into the relevant bath whether upstairs or downstairs. (After WW2 very few of these pumps existed because they had been dismantled for use to pump the water out of the Anderson shelter.)

Many parlour type homes had to use the parlour as an extra bedroom

Lighting was by gas as were the roadways though a uniformed man cycled round with his long pole to light the road lamps the arms of which made good places for some children to hang a rope re a makeshift swing. This was quickly taken down when news of the Brown uniformed patrolman was on his way, one of several who watched over this Cottage estate.

#### Decoration

All the bedrooms, staircase, scullery and bathroom were distempered, what a mess when the coal was delivered, because the cellar was under the staircase with the door in the scullery, whose walls were mainly breeze blocks (a saving on the cost of plaster).

All the woodwork was a natural brown, having been treated with linseed oil, I have been told. Only the main living room had wallpaper, and with regards to flooring, a gap or border of 18 inches had to be left around the edges to enable the walls to dry out completely. Door knobs and the cold water taps in the scullery and bathroom were made of brass.

Every abode was supplied with a backless two door cupboard with a drawer dividing both; also in natural wood which of course matched the picture rail along with as earlier mentioned the doors. The Living room or as it was then, the kitchen had an upright fire range which enabled the family to cook on it, keep warm and save on the cost of using the black gas stove. (this also was provided by the London County Council).

Each of the cottages had privet bushes planted along their front gardens, which were kept trimmed by the LCC workmen, along with the ivy also provided to help to give a greener effect to the overall red bricks. The back gardens were divided with the use of chestnut fencing. External decorating took place around every 5 or 6 years whilst internal work was similar I have been informed.

Three White Rent Offices with their accompanying work yards were to be found; two in Downham Way and one at Northover. Mondays found tenants lining up to pay their rent, and reporting any repairs that were needed.

There were a few red telephone kiosks on the estate, plus red pillar boxes and the Fire Alarm Posts.

By 1930 the population was 30,000, larger than Bromley Canterbury and Winchester.

The infamous Wall re Valeswood road was actually a boundary for Lewisham and Bromley also of course the entry to the County of Kent. This was removed during WW2 to make way for emergency vehicles.

## **Work**

Uniforms were generally provided to all utility occupations, but even shops and factories provided overalls or covering garments according to the work to be done. There were times when even footwear would be given, but only for the job in hand. Most folk especially, the ones given outer wear found that it allowed them to keep their own clothes looking good for a long time; hence, saving money. Recalling the General Strike in 1926, those fortunate to gain employment had to make journeys by Tram or Train (Thank goodness for the Workman's return ticket, which I think was roughly half the cost of a regular one; but you had to have reached your destination or station by 7.30am!).

The local trams were well packed early mornings conveying the many young women and a few males to Bellingham where they alighted and made their way to either The Glennifer Laundry or Robertson's, the jam factory; that's correct "The Golliwog jam". Some folk would make their way to Lee, where The Chiltonian Biscuit Factory awaited their various skills; but others would travel further towards London to operate at Peak Freans Biscuit factory. Now there were men going to work at the London Docks, as well as Surrey Docks, travelling on public transport, cycling or even hitching a lift on a pals pony and cart. Newspaper printers and workers would make their way to Fleet Street, whilst Gas workers headed for the Gasworks at Lower Sydenham, or at Old Kent Road; I am not sure where the Metropolitan Water Board had their premises

Naturally there were Firemen, Ambulance Drivers Policemen, Postmen and telegraph boys; all would have a journey to make before starting their day or night work. Folk left school at the age of 14



years. Many would opt for shop work, because other than the few local shops, they would still be within a 2d ride to Catford or Bromley.

Young 14 year olds would become Delivery boys, cycling from store to house on the cycles with large wire baskets holding the "order", discovered that when reaching the age of 16 years they would be sacked, because at this age the employer had to pay Men's Wages! Of course, there were always plenty of youngsters waiting in the "wings" to come forward. My brother did this, but because The Royal Artillery Territorials had just had their building finished at Southend Village and he had had two weeks camp with them, he enlisted as a regular soldier. (This occurred with many young men from Downham Estate because of the high rate of unemployment).

The nearest place of work, for those with a good form of education was Wrays, who specialised in optical lens. They were situated in Ashgrove Road. There was always the opportunity for lads to apply for an apprenticeship at places such as Elliots or Stones; both electrical engineering companies. When a seasonal travelling fair arrived in the fields at Old Bromley Road, there were generally a few local lads who were willing to earn a few shillings "helping" the owners to run the various rides etc. Just a few would decide to join them on their further travels.

There were those who worked for themselves, rather than join the "dole" queues. Yes they did have to "get on their bikes"; because most of any available work was for Window cleaners, landscape gardeners, cleaners (char women) and they were situated at Hayes, Sidcup, Bromley Common, etc where new private housing was being erected I can recall the fact of there being Blind Piano Tuners, Music Teachers, Cobblers (shoe repairers). Not much money to be made in these occupations on The Estate, but they survived!

### **Schools**

St Johns C of E school Bromley Road Southend Village, open from 1855, and the new one built in Whitefoot Lane opened December 10th 1963.(for a while the old school was used by Age Concern and sadly demolished although it was a Listed Building ,along with the Chapel). This School also came under the London County Councils education standards.

The New Schools erected on Downham Estate

7 Elementary schools for 5,816 pupils

1 Central school for 800 students

1 Open Air school for 130 demolished

1 Reserve site -- {could Malory school have been erected on this area -8/9/1958?}.

1 Built by the L.C.C. but provided by the Bromley Corporation.

Times for Elementary Schools

The School Bell, situated like a small dome on the roof of each school was rung each morning and afternoon 10 minutes prior to the official commencement of education.

Infants; Boys and Girls mixed age 5 years to 7 years

9am to midday home for dinner; 2pm to 4pm (please note this was the only time that the sexes were mixed)

Juniors 7 years to 11 years

9am to midday home for dinner, then 2pm to 4.30pm

Seniors 11 years to 14 years as above for times.

Apart from the Grammar school and Technical college pupils no children had to leave the estate for their education.

Infant and Junior Schools

Rangefield Road--opened April 1925

Downderry Road--opened 1928

Launcelot Road--- (a shelter in the playground, approved 30/7/1936).

Ballamore--(now Merlin)

The Good Shepherd -Moorside Road (Roman Catholic school) 1930

Pendragon was it a Senior School? Became a special needs school by the late 1980s.

Durham Hill --now demolished

Churchdown --now Bonus Pastor -- (comprehensive school) Roman Catholic school

Downham Central Goudhurst Road --demolished 1990s

Open Air School Shroffold Road - recently rebuilt for Special Needs

Not forgetting of course Burnt Ash school, which is also an infant and junior one but under the jurisdiction of Bromley

Downham Nursery Shroffold Road Opened June 1946 (Where the Special Needs now stands?).

Forster Park Boundfield Road (North Downham) June 1952. Infant and Juniors.

### **LCC System**

Infants--Ages 5 years to 7 years - only time during their education that males and females would study together. To my knowledge, the teachers were generally female Juniors--Ages 7 years to 11 years. Girls always had women teachers and the boys, male ones.

Once attaining the age of 10 years, The Junior County Scholarship (examination) had to be taken; This consisted of The Preliminary which if you did not pass meant that you would go to The Senior School; having achieved this there followed The Final; Should one not pass this, you had the chance of attending The Central School. (This entailed the cost of a School Uniform).

This also applied re the uniform when one passed and then attended a Grammar School. These pupils would be the only ones who had to travel, for which they were provided with a L.C.C. Tram pass.

Should a pupil, be extra bright, then they were able to sit for the above examination one year earlier, which would give them the chance of a boarding school, this was The Bluecoat School (Christ's Hospital) Senior School--Ages 11 years to 14 years (the school leaving age)Here there was the opportunity to take a Trade Scholarship at the age of 13 years which if passed the person attended

South London Technical College with of course the cost of School uniform but once again there was the provision of a free tram pass.

This education gave youngsters a good start for an apprenticeship of whichever trade they chose to follow The Central School and Grammar schools--Ages 11years to 16years by which time all students would have taken Matriculation enabling those that passed to enter a University.

School Hours---The School Bell situated on the roof of each school would toll 10minutes before lessons began both morning and afternoon.

9am to noon 2pm to 4pm for the infants 9am to noon 2pm to 4.30pm for the Juniors and Seniors Central and Grammar Schools, still 9am to noon but afternoon times varied except that they finished roughly around 3.30pm for grammar schools re the journey home.

All the elementary schools i.e.; infants, juniors, and seniors had a 15 minute break mid morning and similar during the afternoon.

It should be noted that All Female Staff employed by the L.C.C. to teach were single ladies or War widows (from the Great War) also they had attained their degrees at Universities.

The education provided by the London County Council during the 30s was one of the highest in the British Isles.

The Junior County Scholarship entailed 3 papers; Arithmetic, English and General Knowledge; i.e. History Geography etc.

## **Health**

Young folk, from babies to 14 year olds were cared for with the use of The Welfare clinic, and the School Clinic; i.e. Eyes, Ears, and dental treatment, but with regards to any illness, then it was either The Doctor, for whom money had to be found re the cost of medicine and treatment, or as was generally the case, "Home Cures". What a witch's cauldron these could produce. We were well attended by the doctors, who apart from making up the prescribed medicine would also set Broken Legs and Arms, which helped reduce the cost of the afore breakages re eliminating the cost of an ambulance to a hospital. Oh yes , the ambulance had to be paid for, even when it was to take a highly contagious person with diphtheria to the Brook Hospital at Shooters Hill, or to The Park (later known as Hither Green) for Scarlet Fever.

These two complaints entailed a visit by The Green Van, A disinfecting vehicle which removed mattresses, pillows, sheets, and soft toys in fact anything that could hold the deadly Germs - all to be burned. These occurrences were generally in the summer time, when the youngsters had played on the earlier mentioned 7 Islands, (the land-fill site). I dread to think how long some of the doctors had to wait for their fees, especially where there was a large number of children in one family; but remember it was not just the youngsters who caught these diseases often one of the parents did; remembering that they were Deadly Diseases. Naturally The Doctor was available for Maternity, along with the Midwives and they were kept busy in those early days.

To return to Home Made Remedies; Toast soaked in hot vinegar and wrapped in a cloth and then applied to the throat, having already gargled with salt water to relieve a sore throat; Bread Poultices, for "drawing out" any impurities from say Boils, infected wounds etc, Cloves for toothache, Sweet oil of Almonds for earache, and of course Camphorated Oil re any chesty cold along with well mixed butter and sugar for croup, but I think that the smelliest one was the Garlic cloves re Whooping

Cough; this was rubbed on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet and yes it worked, as long as it was treated as early as possible.

One may enquire about measles and mumps, all considered to be childish ailments to the extent that in a large family mothers were often advised to put all the children together; that way they were all poorly together and it was over and done with, instead of first one and then each taking their turn, lasting three or four weeks instead of the one or two. Naturally there was always the weekly Opening Medicine. Syrup of Figs, Liquorice Powder, Senna Pods or any other "Bowel Opening" medicine, all to try and eliminate all the above ailments and more beside. So many "remedies" all passed down through the generations, and I presume that it was a case of "Kill or Cure" but we have all appeared to survive.

With regards to folk who had employment, they would have to pay for a medical certificate to give to their employer; some of whom would pay their wages whilst off sick or others who would keep their jobs open. There was a type of curfew, whereby the patient was not allowed to be absent from his home between roughly the hours of 6pm and 11am, but having been a small child at this time I stand to be corrected about the actual timing.

### **Holidays**

Shop workers would have a half day each week which in the London boroughs would be Thursday, and in Kent etc. Wednesday was the big day; this was of course along with all day Sunday. Whilst at Junior School, with a class of at least 42, and this was in the middle thirties, only around 6 girls would have a family holiday at the coast, generally a week, because there were many jobs at that time, that did not pay wages for holidays.

Around 20 or so would have "a day out" and this would be with either their local Sunday school or a Workingmen's club or even, if they were lucky a Firm's outing. Most of these trips would be taken either on a fleet of local coaches or even Double Decker buses. There were the odd occasions when if their were sufficient funds Mum could purchase a tram ticket for a 1 shilling all day return I cannot recall how much it was for children, but in this manner we visited most of the London museums even on one occasion, riding to Hampton Court on a Trolley Bus! No not to go into the palace, but just to paddle in the Thames.

Other "days" spent during the summer break would consist of a long walk to Horniman's museum or Blackberrying on Hayes or Keston Commons. Somehow in retrospect it was always warm and sunny! Come September and the start of a new Term there would be around 6 pupils absent; they would have gone Opping (hopping), along with their London based relatives. We found it fascinating to look at the giant sized hopping apples that they would each bring for our teacher. (I still do not know whether they were for eating or cooking).

I would guess that 60% to 70% of Downham folk just could not afford a Holiday, but considering that so many were in this position, most people appeared contented, (guess we were all in the same boat). In fact many felt sorry for those who had been away; leaving their pets etc behind. We were quite busy with all the fine weather, playing in the fields in Old Bromley Road, making Daisy -chains etc whilst many of the boys would be found playing Pirates or such on what was a "landfill" site, in the same road at the bottom of Downham Way , and extended to the River Ravensbourne; the lads had given this area the title of Seven Islands, because after any heavy rain showers or a thunder storm there were many small lakes on the site and with the number of wooden "sleepers" around, well they made great Rafts".

Apart from all this freedom, we had Forster Memorial Park, Beckenham Place Park and of course Durham Hill, a truly great place on a windy day to fly your home-made kites. There were occasional times when a visit to Peter Pan's Pool became possible, and for 1 old penny, you had an "ink stamp" marking the back of your wrist, where upon you were free to use the enclosed area to enjoy the various rides on the miniature train, a switchback ride, the helter-skelter and quite a lot of other entertainment.

Older folk would pay to use the roller skating rink, or pay 6 old pence to hire a canoe or rowing boat on the pond (you had a longer time on these than on a motor boat); but whatever the number was on your craft, the shout would come "come in number 7, or whatever it was, your time is up". Many families from London would have a "Day Out" at this relaxing and fresh air rendezvous. On alighting from their bus or tram the men would generally take themselves into the Green Man Public House which was and still is directly opposite The Pond.

### **Churches**

St John's vicarage was built in 1921 and dedicated by the Bishop of Woolwich. This was later enlarged. The building of the church began in 1926 and the foundation stone was laid by Lord Forster.

In July 1922 he had, under his own personal direction, donated the Forster Memorial Lady Chapel along with a gift of money, and of course the land.

January 28 1928 saw the consecration of the church by the Bishop of Southwark. The Vicar was the reverend Ellis-Edge-Partington (he had held this post since 1923).

The old Forster Chapel now became used as follows, an extra classroom, Jumble sales, Bazaars, various clubs spanning the many age groups, wedding receptions, Flannel Dances (this was where the males wore grey flannel trousers re summertime wear). Along with becoming a nursery and kindergarten. 1977 Work began redesigning the interior of the church re a central Altar. The designer was John Hayward.

St Johns is the Mother church of the area which includes the following;

St Dunstan's at Bellingham whose foundation stone was laid 1924.

St Barnabas Downham Way, foundation stone laid October 6th 1928 and consecrated July 1929

St Luke's Northover, Mission Hall erected 1930 and the church built 1938 it suffered war damage 1941 and was rededicated 1950

St Marks North Downham opened January 1948, and dedicated at 3pm March 26th 1948 by the Lord Bishop of Woolwich. (The site was originally a converted army hut in Castillon Road).

All the above are Church of England.

Roman Catholic Church Moorside Road

Church of the Good Shepherd, A temporary church in place in 1929 on part of what had been Shepherds' Farm. Father Simmons was the priest, later to become a Canon, his young Curate's name was Young he apparently was a film buff.

### **Missions**

Rangefield Mission (Burnt Ash end of Rangefield) Opened October 10th 1933 by the Earl of Shaftesbury, a patron of The Shaftesbury society. Nearly 200 children attended Sunday school. They held meetings for both, Girls Brigade and Boys Brigade along with the attendant Sunday Band Parades.

Salvation Army Old Bromley Road

Opened July 1928 and demolished 1980.

The first meeting was attended by 11 people The London County Council Housing Committee rented 70 Keedonwood Road to them re their Officers who apart from their religious teachings helped with nursing and midwifery; The rent was £45 per annum. Many Clubs for all ages were held in both of the halls and of course there was always the Open Air Sunday Services, held at most street corners with the accompaniment of the Brass Band.

1939 The lower hall was used for sleeping ARP personnel. The local council paid 17 shillings and sixpence per week to the Salvation Army plus the cost of coke for the boiler conditions of terms were said to be reasonable.

Baptist Church The Green Downham Way

1929 July 3rd the site cost £1000; it had originally been the site of the workmen's tea hut. The first meetings lesson was read by the Revd. J. Waite Davies and the collection amounted to £6 10s. Sadly, the church was bombed in 1940 but reopened in 1950.

Wesleyan Church Downham Way (corner of Shroffold road). Opened Saturday April 13th 1929. Cost £10,000 Built to hold 1000? In the large hall and 250 for the second hall. They had Magic Lantern Shows and several Youth Clubs The building is not in use as a place of Worship now and it is known as Wesley Halls, with clubs and meetings spanning all ages and abilities; thanks to the Borough of Lewisham.

The London City Mission-Howard Hall, Churchdown Road. Cost £3,200; one of its benefactors was Miss Mary Howard Mr Charles Penrose was Missionary in Charge Opened 1938 and closed 1940 re WW2 reopened 1946/47.

5 sites for Churches and Chapels plus 1 for a mission hall had been allotted by the London County Council

### **Clubs**

Downham British Legion Old Bromley Road. Demolished during the 1990's.

The Licensing Superintendent of Catford Police, informed me that his father/grandfather used what is now known as Old Bromley Road, on his journey from Hastings to Billingsgate Fish Market to deliver the supply, which was loaded on his horse drawn cart, beneath which his little three legged terrier ran. (Apparently the dog knew of many short cuts) I remember seeing them at least once a week.

The Studio Club/New Studio Club

Y.M.C.A. Downham Way (opposite Valeswood Road). Now a privately owned Gymnasium, originally held several small clubs, ie. First aid, Poor man's lawyer and a goose and tuck club.

Clubs registered with Downham Tenants League 1930:

Choral and orchestral, Sports, Cycling, Sick club, and Lending library.

Junior girls and boys clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Junior Co-Op Guild.

Downham Boys Club (part of Bermondsey Mission) Opened 1934 in Valeswood Road. Handed over to the Mayor of Bromley 1949.

Valeswood Community Centre Bill Morris Founded 1st Youth Club at this centre

Downham Harriers formed 1930

Mr Simmonds--Trainer.

Downham Football Club

Downham Tavern/Tavern Theatre Downham Way. Opened May 29th 1930. Leased to Barclay, Perkins and Co. The front hall in which was installed the longest Bars (able to serve 1000 glasses of beer thereby mentioned in the Guinness Book of Records). The larger Concert Hall seated 800 customers. The "governor" was a cockney, Mr John Rowlands who maintained that he was "A big man with a big family and a big heart, therefore the right person to be in charge of a Big Tavern on a Big Estate".

1931 Wednesday Ballroom Dancing.

Thursday Old Contemptible Dance. Friday Concert, Lewisham Borough Concert Band., entry fee 1 shilling (5p)

Saturday Dwyer's Orchestra - free

1953 Manager Mr Johnson

Monday Star Variety Show entry fee 3 pence, 6 pence (including tax) 10/1/1953.

The Northover Public House was opened 1937 re New Downham; later named The Governor General (re Lord Forster, having had that distinction, i.e. Governor General of Australia from 1920 to 1925). Sadly he died 1936. The building was demolished by 2000 and a petrol station now stands on the site.

## **Shops**

In May 1925 the nearest shops were at Bellingham or Bromley, Shops started to open at Ash Grove Parade (now named Bromley Hill), the first one being a Chemist on the 3rd of December 1925.

Approaching the shops from Ashgrove Road there were a few hoardings, before reaching Peter Logans a Bakers and Restaurant. (Should one shop for a loaf of bread after midday then it would only cost 1penny because it was classed as stale bread re the fresh batches that were ready for afternoon tea.

Also after 4pm one could purchase 1 pennyworth of stale cakes; although these like the "stale bread" had only been made that morning.

Buglers, an Off-licence, where not only bottled beer was sold but also Draught Ale One would see many customers carrying their jugs or other containers to purchase the latter because it was that

much cheaper; after all it cost an extra penny for a 1 pint bottle or 2 pence for a quart one. This money was returned on taking the empty bottles back, similar applied to lemonade bottles etc.

At this time Wine bottles were delivered to the stores encased in straw "sleeves", this was great for November 5th i.e. Stuffing the Guy, and how well it burned on the bonfire.

Pearks, a grocers come dairy, but also a Sub Post Office Cullens This also was a grocers but with a stronger tendency towards a wide range of Tea and Coffee and spices.

Hearns The Family Butchers. Here one would see the beef, lamb and pigs carcasses hanging, until the correct time for them to be cut into various joints etc. Should you require some suet then it was stripped from the carcase before your eyes, similarly re liver, hearts and kidneys.(Quite a lesson in Anatomy).

Duncans Chemist (as mentioned earlier, the first shop to open) "Oil shop" A hardware store, paraffin, Creosote, Yellow scrubbing soap Scrubbing Brushes, Buckets, Saucepans, Bundles of chopped wood for lighting the fires etc

Hairdressers

Two shops, one for ladies the other for gentlemen. This was a Family business, where father and son had one salon whilst the daughter Greta controlled the ladies salon. Greta carried on the business after her father and brother left; in fact right through W.W.2 and well into the 1950s when she finally retired.

About the mid 1930s the hoardings came down at the corner of Ashgrove Road and 3"matching"shops were erected; the first a Car salesroom, whilst the other two became a Confectioners, newsagents I think the name was Holdings and their disabled son-in-law ran a shoe repairers.

I have just remembered, Newmans the radio and record shop where one could take their accumulators; this I believe was between Hearns the butcher and Duncans the Chemist.

Please note that these stores made daily deliveries to the private homes in Ashgrove road Coniston, Calmont Etc. Whilst the restaurant at Peter Logans was used by staff from the local school but generally by visitors to the many Sports Clubs nearby.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Many residents of Lewisham used to take weekend walks over the 'Seven Fields', (although the site of Downham's Estate covered more than the seven fields). Downham covered the lands of two farms, Holloway to the west and Shroffolds to the north.

In the late nineteenth century there was a rifle range near Holloway Farm, hence the name Rangefield Road. Both farms were part of the extensive Lee Estate of the Baring family. The land was mainly used for mixed agriculture, and farmed by tenants, John Dale at Shroffolds and Thomas Edgerton at Holloway in 1843. Shroffolds, of some 258 acres, was an ancient farmstead, taking its name from an ancient Manor, Shrafholt, owned in the Middle Ages by the Banquel family. It remained in existence until the beginning of this century. Holloway was only slightly smaller, some 224 acres in extent. Its farmhouse stood on the eastern side of Bromley Road, (formerly it had been on the western), at the bottom of Bromley Hill. It is believed to have began life as a gate house for Bromley Hill House, now



the Bromley Court Hotel. The name Holloway derives from 'Hollow Way', the name of Bromley Road before it was turnpiked in 1718 and on which the farm stood. The area of Southend, even as late as 1924, was described in the official guide as a 'lovely rural place'. The village has a long history and first appears in the parish records in 1560. It straddled Bromley Road, the main road from Kent into London, by which fruit and vegetables were transported to the markets. There was a blacksmiths forge in the village, and the London to Sevenoaks stage coach used to stop there.

During the 19th century, the more affluent had been able to leave London's centre for the suburbs, due to the opening of railways. However, for the working classes to do likewise, a cheaper and more reasonable form of transport had to be found. This was delayed until 1844, when the L.C.C. acquired the tramways. These were electrified and expanded, as operating costs were lower than that of their horsedrawn counterparts. However, a railway was extended to Southend in 1892, and the railways were to play an important part in Downham's creation. It was their function to transport the sand and ballast from the L.C.C.'s sandpit, following an extension of the railways from Hither Green sidings crossing Downham Way via what is now Shroffold Road.

The main part of Downham's Estate, over 6,000 houses, was completed by the summer of 1930, its builders being Messrs. Holland, Hannen & Cubbitts Ltd., whilst an additional Estate of 1,038 houses was developed at Whitefoot Lane in 1937, by builders Higgs & Hill, for the L.C.C., and is generally known today as North Downham; (this number has since diminished to a total of 6,700 due to Hitler's Second World War bombings on London) but on completion, some 30,000 people lived on Downham's newly built Estate. However, with no factories, they commuted to work in London by train, tram or bus. Trains went from Grove Park, commencing as early as June 1925. A cheap workman's ticket became available from November 1928.

Shopping facilities first came in 1926 on the New Bromley Road, followed later by centres at Grove Park, Burnt Ash Lane and one adjacent to the Downham Tavern. The Downham Tavern was the only public house built on the area owned by the L.C.C., all the others being technically outside its boundaries. It was for some years the world's largest pub, containing a Dance Hall, Beer Garden, two Saloon Bars, a Public Lounge, a Lunchroom (with flats above) and service was by waiter only.

The name 'Downham' derives from Lord Downham (William Hayes Fisher) a former chairman of the L.C.C., and in Old English means 'settlement on a hill', which certainly applies to some of the steeper roads on the Estate. Many of the road names were taken from Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King', though there is no evidence that King Arthur had any connections with this area. Other roads, such as Ilfracombe, took their names from places in Devon.

As the ground rises in the middle of the Estate, this part could not easily be built upon, and so were left open space. The Ravensbourne and Spring Brook ran through part of the Estate, but were put into conduits when the Estate was built. New roads were built, such as Downham Way, whilst others such as Whitefoot Lane were much altered.

When Downham was first built it was regarded as a showpiece, a 'cottage Estate'. It was a low density estate, with about 17 houses per acre, grouped around open spaces and served by shops. A Lewisham Official Guide written in the 1930's described Downham as a 'Garden City'.

In 1926 a seven foot wall was placed across Valeswood Road, at its junction with Alexandra Crescent. It was built by a private estate developer in response to objections from Bromley's private home owners to 'vulgar' people using their road as a short cut to Bromley's town centre. Bromley's Town Council refused to remove the wall and the L.C.C. and Lewisham Council found themselves

powerless to remove it either. It was not removed until the early part of the Second World War, when fire engine access became essential.

In early 1927, a visit by King George V and Queen Mary to open the L.C.C.'s 17,000th dwelling, left egg on the face of the local councillors. During their visit a tree was to be planted at the dwelling, 165 Downham Way, but due to a half day holiday being given to all Council workers, the tree was unfortunately locked away with the ceremonial spade in a council hut. This is to be rectified on the Festival Opening Day, when the error of 60 years ago is to be put straight in the planting of another tree.

With additional recreation, the dream of the future Downham saw Forster Memorial Park opened in 1922 by Henry William Forster, who presented the Park to Lewisham in 1919 as a memorial to his two sons who were killed in the First World War. More land has been added to this original bequest, and now covers some 42 acres. In 1937, Downham witnessed the opening of a Swimming Pool and Library in Moorside Road, and a Cinema, 'The Splendid' which did a roaring trade in Bromley Road until its closure in 1957. Sadly in that year, St, John's railway disaster claimed 94 lives, many of whom lived on Downham.

By 1960, the philosophy behind Downham's creation was beginning to alter as the first L.C.C. houses were put up for sale. Although originally the houses cost a few hundred pounds, this figure is far inflated by today's cost of living and to buy a house it now costs far more in Downham – Garden City.

## **WIDER IMPLICATIONS**

London Government structure is inherently political. When Labour took control of the London County Council in 1934, Herbert Morrison became Leader and swiftly turned the administration into a Labour flagship. The LCC's powers were very extensive and Morrison managed to effectively force money out of the central government to pay for the new Waterloo Bridge in 1937. The Labour administration became popular with Londoners, and Labour's control was challenged only once afterwards (fought off by the election of more Labour alderman).

As more people moved out of central London and into the suburbs outside the LCC boundaries (fixed as long ago as 1855), the Labour control became unchallengeable and so the Conservative government moved to create a council covering the whole greater London area which had a decent chance of being Conservative controlled. In 1957 Sir Edwin Herbert was appointed to head a Royal Commission on the matter, and in 1960 this reported in favour of an enlarged area of London where new London Boroughs were to be the primary institution of local government, and a Greater London Council having fewer powers than the LCC had. However, many outer areas fought a successful campaign against inclusion in the area on the (mistaken) basis that it would increase their rates.

London Government Act 1963

230,000 dwellings, including the suburban estates, transferred to the newly created GLC. It was allowed by government to delay handover of former LCC stock as a bargaining tool to get borough councils to do what it wanted, and to meet its own needs as a housing developer

The GLC first came up for re-election in April 1967. This was at a time when the Harold Wilson government first became unpopular. The elections in 1967 produced a Conservative landslide with 82 seats to Labour's 18. Labour won only the working-class East End boroughs, together with Southwark and one seat in Greenwich. Labour's performance was worst in its safest seats - a 20%

swing in Islington - but in general the 1967 election was not so much of a disaster in votes. The effect of the large multi-member constituencies was to greatly exaggerate the winning margin. Shortly after the election, one of the Conservatives in Greenwich was found to be disqualified and resigned, leading to a narrow Labour gain in a byelection.

When Conservatives captured the GLC and almost all the boroughs in 1967, housing policy switched drastically to council house sales and stock transfer to the boroughs, although both were at first curtailed by a Labour government until 1970 and reversed with Labour back at County Hall from 1973.

Selling council houses, tried under Sir Desmond Plummer, became the order of the day and was lauded by Mrs Thatcher. Council house sales started under Plummer, with 10,000 GLC homes sold.

The first person to buy their council house in London was 44 year-old James Regan of Sheffield Drive, Harold Hill on October 4, 1967. He had moved to the estate from Stepney in 1953 and had lived in Sheffield Drive since 1958.

1973-77 GLC returned to Labour.

Under Horace Cutler, leader of the GLC from 1977-81 the Conservatives at County Hall not only sped up the sale of council housing (which they called the 'Sale of the Century'), but also block transferred the GLC's remaining stock to any borough that would accept it. 'Homesteading' was introduced, to allow less well-off Londoners to buy empty and abandoned properties and improve them.

Right to Buy legislation Housing Act 1980

1981

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine)

In May 1980 the Greater London Council requested me to make an order under section 23 (3) of the London Government Act 1963 transferring the council's housing stock in the London boroughs of Brent, Camden, Hackney, Haringey, Hounslow, Lambeth, Lewisham and Waltham Forest to the borough councils. These boroughs were unwilling to accept the transfer of the stock.

I shall be making an order transferring the stock to the borough councils on 1 April 1982, and intend to lay it before Parliament in the near future.

The rest of the houses—the 163,000—were transferred to 24 boroughs on a voluntary basis. This represents the last part of the programme, to complete the exercise. The number of houses to be transferred is 53,428. I can tell the House that of the houses covered by the order some 700 are subject to right-to-buy applications by the tenants.

Mr. Christopher Price (Lewisham, West) Will the right hon. Gentleman tell Lewisham council how it is to find the nearly £1 million necessary to equalise the existing rents of the GLC with those of Lewisham?

Sums of money allocated to Lewisham for the transfer

1981-2	1982-3
£7,834,000	£993,000

1987 Lewisham put the rents up. Housing Act 1988 changed rules of succession and rent regulation.  
Feb 1988 cladding of the prefabs. A split occurred between the North Downham Tenants Association  
and the bungalows (prefabs).