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LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Bookhams Bulletin

Quarterly Journal of the Bookham Community Association

No. 87

JUNE 1955.

23rd year



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The BOOKHAMS BULLETIN

Quarterly Journal of the Bookham Community Association

No. 87.

JUNE, 1955.

23rd year

The Editor "Brandreth" Sole Farm Road, Gt. Bookham.
Business Manager "Aldbourne" Sole Farm Road, Gt. Bookham,

EDITORIAL

By the time you receive your *Bulletin* summer will be here and you will be enjoying the delights of summer weather and the pleasures of the open air. For the Association, however, there will be no relaxation, only a month separates our two major annual events.

On Saturday, June 18th, all roads will lead to Polesden Lacey, where the Bookham Community Association is presenting in the open air theatre Shakespeare's "Hamlet". The village can take pride in the fact that the fine stage was given to the National Trust by Bookham. Hundreds of people from far and wide travel to Bookham for this annual event, but there are still many local people who do not come and who do not realise that they miss a really outstanding dramatic presentation.

With incurable optimism we offer yet another outdoor Fête, on Saturday, July 16th. Our fifth Village Day will follow the pattern of other years. There will be displays by groups of the Association. Village organisations will be arranging sideshows, etc., and as a link with the past, Surrey Community Players will be bring-

ing a medieval play to the village and Bookham residents will be given the opportunity of enjoying the entertainment that was most popular among English people six hundred years ago.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Is the *Bulletin* worth while? From the Editorial in the last issue it would appear that our Editor is beginning to have misgivings. She need not worry: Bookham appreciates her efforts, of that there's not the slightest doubt, however little Tom, Dick and Harry are prepared to do to keep the publication going.

Indeed, to challenge the value of the *Bulletin* is to question the usefulness of the Community Association whose interests it serves. Ten years ago the enthusiasts who brought it into being may have had difficulty in justifying the establishment of another society in a village which already had too many. But to-day who would question their foresight? The rapid growth of the Bookhams has underlined the importance of proper facilities for recreation. We really do need a place where we can meet as a

community for leisure-time activities, and which has no political or religious affiliations.

To-day when so many good things are State-provided we are apt to forget what a lot we still owe to voluntary, unpaid public-spirited effort. The *Bulletin* is a case in point—produced by a few energetic and talented people who collect the news (and no one but the Editor knows how difficult the job can be!), write the articles, sell the advertising space and deliver the 2,000 copies of each issue from door to door. Every household in the district receives a copy free of charge, and even so the *Bulletin* is financially self-supporting.

For the past few weeks we have all been without national newspapers: they are part of our life and we have felt lost without them. We need local news too, and it would be a thousand pities if the *Bulletin* had to cease publication. It is to be hoped that our Editor's *cri de cœur* will produce the desired result in the shape of news and articles for publication.

WILLIAM T. COOPER.

The Croft,
Dowlans Road,
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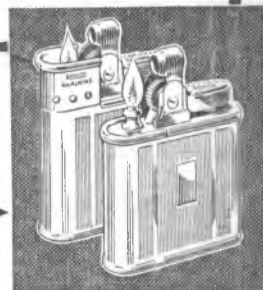
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BOOKHAM COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION NEWS

Bookham Camera Club.

The Bookham Camera Club, which has a long and distinguished record, has now become a Group within the Community Association. There has for some time past been a close link and we are proud to welcome them as members of our Association and look forward to even greater co-operation. From September the Camera Club will meet at the Old Barn Hall on alternate Thursdays. Particulars from Hon. Sec., J. W. Selby. Tel.: Leatherhead 3622.

Over Sixties Club.

This club, now in its fifth year, continues to flourish. It has a membership of 90—100 and an

average weekly attendance of 70—75. There is a library, also a choir and percussion band, and a fine darts team. The monthly whist drives are much appreciated, also the social afternoons. Parties are organised to theatres and ice shows and the annual seaside outing is a great event. There is a benevolent fund for the sick, and those in distress and sick members are visited in their homes or in hospital. Transport to and from the weekly meetings is available for the infirm. A chiropody service is available.

Gramophone Club.

This club has now closed for the summer months, but will re-open on Thursday, September 8th, at 8 p.m. Enq. Bookham 2404.

HAMLET

The choice of "Hamlet" for the production at Polesden Lacey on Saturday, June 18th, should be a popular one. The story of the young and ill-fated Prince of Denmark is a dramatic one, as those who saw the film, in which Laurence Olivier starred some years ago, will know. To play the part of Hamlet is the ambition of most actors. It is an exacting role and requires youth, sympathy and intelligence. Polesden Lacey theatre enthusiasts will be glad to hear that Ronald Kirkwood, who made such a superb Ariel last year and who charmed audiences as Orlando in "As You Like It", has been selected for Hamlet.

To see "Hamlet" performed in the open air will be an interesting experience because it is rarely attempted in England either by professionals or amateurs. Some of our leading groups of players have, however, had the privilege of visiting Elsinore, in Denmark, the scene of the tragedy which Shakespeare immortalised, to present the play on the ancient battlements.

The Community Association is pleased to announce that Miss Elsie Green has again consented to be producer and that a number of the players who have distinguished themselves on the Polesden Lacey stage are again appearing, including Barbara Stead, Redmayne Fitzgerald and Donald Coombs.

POLESDEN LACEY, — Open Air Theatre

By kind permission of The National Trust

Bookham Community Association's

FOURTH SHAKESPEARIAN PRESENTATION

HAMLET

Producer: ELSIE GREEN

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Group 1. Under 12 on June 30th.
Group 2. 12 years, but under 17 on June 30th.

Please mark your entries clearly at top of page with name, age and number of words. In the event of a tie prizes will be awarded to neatest entries. Foreign words and proper names not allowed. Last date for entries June 30th. Prizes to be presented on Village Day. All entries to: The Editor, *Bookhams Bulletin*, Brandreth, Sole Farm Road, Gt. Bookham.

BOOKHAM CAMERA CLUB EXHIBITION

The exhibition held by Bookham Camera Club at the Old Barn Hall on April 16th and later at the Red House was quite as successful as those held previously, thanks to the combined efforts of all members. Outstanding among the prints were several fine cat studies by Mrs. Major, who won three awards, as well as a number of excellent prints by K. M. Chapman (three awards) and P. E. J. Littledale (one award). Unfortunately the Club is losing the last two workers. However, the work of several others shows considerable promise and we remain optimistic for the future, provided we can continue to attract new members. Two excellent invitation panels from the Exhibition Judge, Mr. H. G.

Trodd, F.R.P.S., and from members of Sutton Camera Club, added considerably to the interest of the exhibition.

For the first time there was a section for colour slides, and a number of these were shown in an illuminated display cabinet kindly constructed by Mr. J. C. Fuller. At intervals these slides were projected on a screen with a short commentary by Mr. P. A. Ball.

In the evening, following a brief presentation ceremony, at which Mrs. Major received the Gordon Stephens Challenge Cup and members received their exhibition awards from the President, Mr. Blaxland Stubbs, there was a most interesting lecture illustrated by colour slides on "Life in Mexico", by Mr. Mark Chamberlain.

This, the Ninth Annual Exhibition, marks the close of an era in the life of the Bookham Camera Club, which from now on becomes a Group of the Community Association, with whose support and encouragement the Club looks forward to a bright and happy future.

EASTWICK ALLOTMENTS & GARDENS ASSOCIATION

This Association has been formed "to promote the interests of allotment holders and gardeners and take joint action for the benefit of members". Membership is open to any resident in the Bookham area, the subscription being 2/6 per annum. One of the advantages of membership is that fertilizers and seeds can be obtained at greatly reduced prices. The allotments' shed will be open every Sunday from

10 a.m. until 12 for the sale of these. It is hoped to arrange for instruction in horticulture, as well as lectures, discussions, exhibitions and competitions. Further particulars can be obtained from the Secretary, Mr. J. Sherman, 17 Newenham Road, Gt. Bookham.

FOLK DANCERS

Writing at this the end of our folk dancing season it is possible to appraise the work of the Group during the past winter. Most of the meetings have been jolly affairs and the progress of members is evidenced by the facility with which they learn new dances, even difficult ones.

No doubt the severity of the weather, and winter ailments, have affected the attendances at the classes, but the fact remains that, owing to the loss of several members from one cause or another, and the lack of folk to take their places, our numbers are not really sufficient now to maintain the class on a working basis unless all attend on every occasion, and that is not always possible.

The Group has existed for more than a quarter of a century, and times were when to its parties came folk dancers from all around so that the Church House was full to overflowing. What a pity it will be if this traditional form of enjoyment has to be abandoned in Bookham, notwithstanding our increased population, just because there are not a few folk sufficiently interested to support the class and help to keep it alive.

Enquiries will be welcomed by (Tel. 2206.) RALPH LAMBERT

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“THE CHESTER DELUGE”

“The Deluge”, which is the play chosen for performance at Bookham, is perhaps the best known of all the Mystery plays of the Middle Ages. These plays were performed yearly and were eagerly awaited events. Crowds poured into the big cities where the plays were staged, trade was brisk and the churches were crowded by pilgrims seeking to combine the spectacle of the plays with a visit to the holy relics and shrines.

The plays were performed either upon travelling pageant wagons or on set tableaux stages, play succeeding play from sunrise to sunset. Each play was a living colourful page from biblical history tinged, however, with characteristics not to be found in biblical text. Medieval people were not incapable of reverence but they had a great appetite for comedy and farce, particularly of the slapstick variety, and they loved to see contemporary manners satirised upon the stage. What they sought for and what they got in their simple Mystery plays was an amazing mixture of everything that is now sought for on the comic and tragic stages, the cinema, the variety stage, the television and the radio.

No better example of a Mystery play could be chosen than “The Chester Deluge”. It is an accurate representation of a biblical story; it is tragedy and it is farce, all dramatised within the space of thirty-five minutes. God appears

to Noah and warns him of his intention to destroy all living creatures excepting Noah and his family. Instructions are given for the building of the ark and Noah with his sons and their wives set to work. Noah, however is a henpecked husband and his wife reveals a certain reluctance to treat his fears with reverence. She cooperates at first but soon begins to laugh at the efforts of the others, and when Noah tries to persuade her to join him on the ark one feels the lash of a womanly tongue that has lost nothing of its power through the ages.

When the deluge begins Noah’s wife is drinking with her gossips and, with a fascinating combination of shrewishness and generosity, she refuses to leave her friends for the safety of the ark.

The scene in which she is forcibly carried to the ark by her sons to greet her long-suffering husband with a round box in the ears is one of the best known passages in medieval comedy.

It might appear inconceivable that a passage of convincing tragedy should follow immediately upon a scene as farcical as the one described but, such was the simplicity and honesty of the medieval approach to drama, the closing scenes of the play are both tragic and majestic. The ark is seen as the last surviving work of Man abandoned to the will of God and it thus becomes a symbol capable of being read for all time.

Francis Edwards, producer for the Surrey Community Players, contributes this article

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A SHORT HISTORY OF BOOKHAM, SURREY PART VIII

BY JOHN HARVEY, F.S.A.

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In contrast to the rich documentation of the early fourteenth century, little has survived from the next 150 years of Bookham's history. The court rolls have perished, very few deeds have survived, and the earliest will is of 1485, that year of Bosworth Field which in common estimation put an end to the Middle Ages. There is little doubt that Bookham suffered severely from the Black Death, and that economically it never fully recovered. The weekly market disappeared and the importance of the north-south road linking Cobham to Dorking declined. Once it had been found more profitable by Chertsey Abbey to lease its manors as separate farms for money rents, the route from Chertsey to Horley through Cobham, Bookham and Dorking lost its former significance. No longer were the villages parts of a system which embraced them all: each had to sink or swim by itself.

Simultaneously with this development of leaseholds in the chief manor, the lesser manors assumed more the character of the country gentleman's residence. In spite of foreign wars and pestilence at home, the fourteenth century was an age of civilisation in England, and law and order were well maintained. In the latter half of the century the outstanding figure in

Bookham was Nicholas Slyfield. Succeeding to the Slyfield estate as a boy in 1329, he lived until c. 1395. In 1360 he was one of the Collectors of Tax for Surrey, in 1368 added to Slyfield another large freehold, sat in the Parliament of 1382-83 and from 1389 was on the county Commission of the Peace. Towards the end of his life he was in close touch with William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and ex-Lord Chancellor. Slyfield was a trustee for the Dabernon estates and must have been a great influence in the neighbourhood. He may well have been the chief promoter of the building of a fine new porch of two storeys on the south side of Great Bookham Church.

This porch, now sadly mutilated, was in its time a building of considerable beauty as well as practical value. The twelfth-century nave with its narrow aisles already looked old-fashioned beside the splendid new chancel of 1341, and the parishioners would not wish to be outdone by the Abbot, their landlord and rector. The use of the porch both for religious and secular purposes was considerable. The opening of the baptismal service took place there, and so did the whole of a medieval marriage, as we are reminded by Chaucer's Wife of Bath: 'housbondes at chirche-dore she hadde fyve.' The public notices still posted on the door are a survival of the porch's use for many civil purposes, from the public payment of legacies and

execution of deeds to the sitting of the Coroner's Court. For such uses it was convenient to have a separate room, and this was one of the reasons for the two-storied design. But besides such occasional use, the upper floor was frequently the village schoolroom, where children were taught the 3 Rs by the Vicar or a chantry priest. There is some evidence that such a school existed in Great Bookham.

This porch dates from the last quarter of the fourteenth century, as do two charming windows inserted in Little Bookham Church, one of which survives in the north wall of the nave, while the other, now blocked, is on the south of the chancel. The next building to survive is the Slyfield Chapel, added on the south of Great Bookham Church as a family chantry towards the middle of the fifteenth century. Traces of its separate priest's door may still be seen. The date is roughly fixed by the likeness of the work to that of Lingfield Church, known to have been rebuilt soon after 1431. At this period the Slyfields were at the height of their power, and acquired the great Polesden estate at the south end of Bookham in addition to their own. Thomas Slyfield (c. 1410—died 1470), who figures extensively in the *History of Parliament*, was an M.P. for Surrey in 1450-51 and married an heiress, Anne Weston. Their son William Slyfield (c. 1440—died c. 1485) had a distinguished career as a barrister, King's secretary,

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and diplomat, ending his life as Treasurer of Calais. His father at the end of his life had resold Polesden to the Norbury family, and they in turn built a chapel on the north side of Great Bookham Church, whose windows survive in the nineteenth-century aisle.

No such enlargements took place at Little Bookham, where the old south aisle actually disappeared during this period. The lords of that manor were descendants of the Braose family, and it passed from hand to hand in confused sequence between 1395 and 1498. From 1480 until 1498 Little Bookham belonged to Thomas Grevyle who adopted the surname of Cokesey, that of the grandmother through whom he inherited the manor. He seems to have been resident and may have built the grand timbered barn which still exists.

The fifteenth century saw a return of turbulence in civil life, and the few records of Bookham inhabitants of the time suggest local disturbances. In 1434 John Bowet, esquire, and Thomas Slyfeld, esquire, both of Great Bookham, were required to take an oath not to maintain peace-breakers; in 1450 the general pardon to supporters of Jack Cade's rebellion includes all the inhabitants of Great and Little Bookham, specifying by name Richard Baker, 'laborer' of the latter, and Stephen Stylewell and Nicholas Bowet, 'husbondmen', and Bartholomew

atte Style, 'smyth' of the former; in 1467 twenty-six persons, among them Thomas Slyfeld 'gentilman' and Richard Kyng 'husbondman' of Great Bookham, received pardon for having conspired to cause Richard atte Welle of Leatherhead to be wrongly imprisoned for housebreaking and horse-stealing. Elsewhere Sir Thomas Malory, quite rightly imprisoned for his crimes, was writing the first classic of English prose: the times were out of joint.

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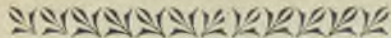


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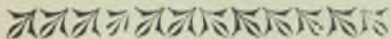
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