

Bromley Notes

My three times great grandfather, Godfrey Stidolph, representative of an old Kentish family found in the Tonbridge area in the 14th century and traceable in a direct line going back to 1450, moved to the town in 1768 and acquired land behind Sir Christopher Wren's Bromley College where he set up one of the first market gardens in England. The site was noted for a fine old mulberry tree and College Slip remained in the family until the 1890s. Under subsequent ownerships, the land was still used in this way until the end of the 20th century. The Stidolphs originally occupied the old cottage which was restored in the last century. Godfrey Stidolph also rented nursery land adjacent to Sheppard College.

In 1793 Godfrey Stidolph was called upon by the churchwardens to plant horse chestnut trees in the churchyard. There is little doubt that the present worthy specimens are descendants of those planted then.

G.S. knew Joseph Paxton, the architect of the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace and, when the exhibition was over, acquired from Paxton a handsome purple beech tree which had been grown on the site. He transported this to Farwig Lane and had it planted in the garden of his picturesque half timbered house which was demolished in the 1950s. The public house then built, and still occupying, the land was named The Beech Tree by way of commemoration.

The Stidolph family grew and descendants acquired other land in Bromley which they used as garden nurseries, including the site at the bottom of the High Street, now occupied by Habitat.

The male line of the family had disappeared from Bromley early in the 20th

century but, over the period of nearly 150 years during which they had lived there and played a significant part in the life of the town, thirty six of them were buried in the parish churchyard. None of their memorial stones survived the bombing of WW2.

Howard Blandford-Baker
Pettywell 26.4.05



Dear Dr Young,

Reading the Parish Magazine for May I was horrified by your reference to wondering "whether we should pull it (the Church) down and start again" Surely churches are built to stand for several hundred years and it is barely 50 years or so since Bromley Parish Church was rebuilt after the war, and only 22 since the rooms were added.

I admit I have not visited Bromley since the 1970s so have no idea what change in circumstances made you feel "the church has had it's day" But having lived through the trauma of post-war rebuilding (when my father was churchwarden) I wouldn't wish a repetition of that experience on anyone.

But of course you youngsters don't know what I am talking about – even though you are or have been a churchwarden! Have a thought for the feelings of oldsters like myself before pulling anything down.

Yours sincerely,

Marjorie Sandle
Eastbourne 26.05.05

PS Did you see yesterday's "Grand Design" programme about restoring an Irish ruined church and converting it into a dwelling?

