

# LEISURELY CROYDON

What do Croydonians traditionally get up to in their leisure hours? Well, there's sport, although this has led to the odd run-in with the law over the years over ancient rights to celebrate winning and losing. And there's drinking - this ancient pastime has brought citizens and visitors into conflict with the law on more than one occasion, too. And we also go shopping. Long before the Whitgift Centre was a money-making glint in the Whitgift Foundation's eye, we had fairs and markets. Some of these turned riotous and just had to go. Others remain to this day.



Wrestling, Crystal Palace Park

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **The games people play**

Good Friday games  
Rounders  
Boxing  
Shirley cricketers  
Squirrel hunting and badger  
baiting  
Fox hunting  
Cockfighting  
Falconry  
Defanging adders  
Marbles  
Rough football  
Quieter football  
Tenuous football link  
Tournaments and jousting  
Re-enactors in Frylands  
Wood...  
...and in Addiscombe  
Archiepiscopal bans  
Off-target archbishop  
Display of lasso work  
Beulah Spa  
Crystal Palace  
Woodside races

## **Croydon's watering holes**

The Badger  
The Beehive  
The Black Bear  
The Black Horse  
The Black Lion  
The Blackmore's Head and the  
Green Man  
Bunker's Knob, Addington  
The Catherine Wheel  
The Chequer/Checker  
The Cricketers, Addington  
The Crown Inn  
The Dog and Bull  
The Falcon  
The Fox and Goose  
The George  
The George Inn  
(Wetherspoon's)  
The Globe

The Goat House  
The Green Dragon  
The Greyhound  
The Greyhound, Carshalton  
The Gun Alehouse  
The Hare and Hounds  
The Jolly Sailor  
The King's Arms / Goody's  
The King's Arms  
The Lamb Inn  
The Leslie  
Ye Old Fox  
The Plough, Beddington  
The Ramblers' Rest  
The Red Deer, Smitham  
Bottom  
The Red Lion, Coulsdon  
The Rising Sun  
The Rose and Crown  
The Royal Oak  
The Sandrock  
The Ship Inn  
The Sun Tap  
The Surprise  
The Surrey Drovers  
The Swan Inn  
The Three Tuns  
The Wattenden Arms,  
Waddington  
The Well House Inn, Mugswell  
The Wheatsheaf  
The White Bear

## **Markets and fairs**

The Markets  
The Fairs

## **The Norwood Gypsies**

# THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Croydon has a long sporting history, sometimes tainted by violence and cruelty. For some snippets it was a toss-up between putting them here or in Crime and Punishment! Shirley in particular seems to have had a strong sporting (and bloodthirsty) history, or possibly just a lot of people who recorded their pastimes. Here's a look at some of the events of which we can be ashamed or proud.

## GOOD FRIDAY GAMES

Good Friday games played in Shirley until about 1885 included quoits, with the score kept on a tally or notched stick. Walking about, known as 'perambulation', was also popular.

## ROUNDERS

Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century rounders used to be played on Sunday afternoons on a piece of land called 'The Green' at the foot of the Addington Hills.

## BOXING

According to an issue of the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1935, Bandy Mount in the Shirley Hills was the site of prize-fighting contests, held regularly on Sunday mornings.

## SHIRLEY CRICKETERS

Cricket was played in Stevenson's Park as early as 1830-31, with the score marked on hazel sticks. This came to an end in 1838. In 1855 cricket was played in a meadow that is now Shirley Park Farm. The players from both sides would then converge on the Sun for a meal. The cricket ball would be rolled from one end of the table to the other, with the winners cheering and the losers groaning and clenching their fists. In around 1882 cricket began to be played at the rear of Shirley Inn, a few years later moving to the meadow west of the church. This land was given to the

parish as a sports ground in 1907 by John, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Eldon. In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cricket was played on the land opposite the windmill.

## SQUIRREL HUNTING AND BADGER BAITING

Thankfully these barbaric and bloodthirsty pastimes have gone, but once upon a time the people of Shirley would hunt squirrels on Sunday mornings. The Badger operated until around 1846. It was an inn used by Londoners who went there on Sundays for badger baiting and stood on the corner of Oaks Road and Badgers' Hole.

## FOX HUNTING

The outlying bits of Croydon were involved in fox hunting for many years. The kennels of the Old Surrey Foxhounds were at Garston Hall in Waddington from around 1840 to 1902. The hall was once at the heart of the thriving community. The foundations of some of the buildings can still be seen.

Book illustrator Hablot Knight Browne (Phiz) moved from Thornton Heath to a villa at Duppas Hill in Victorian times. He was a keen hunter and often portrayed horse-related sports. Memories of local hunts linger in pub names such as the Fox & Hounds, the

Surrey Hounds and so on.

This barbaric bloodsport was banned by the UK's Labour government in 2004, but in 2005 hunters gathered at Warren Barn Farm in Woldingham on the first weekend following the ban on hunting with dogs. They stayed within the law and chased a scent trail instead of a fox. Around 25 police officers were watching, with cameras, to prevent trouble between opposing sides. This amounted to a few verbal exchanges. According to the report in the *Croydon Advertiser*, around 200 riders aged from three to about 70 turned up on the icy day. There was a huge roar from the supporters when a huntsman's horn announced that the hounds had arrived. The joint masters of the hunt pledged to continue meetings and to press to get the government ejected at the next elections. They failed. One man who kept 100 hounds claimed his livelihood depended on the hunt. He said he couldn't tell his dogs off if they killed a fox that day as they were just 'doing their job'. The joint master 'drew chilling laughs' from the tweedy crowd when he said they would keep within the law 'but of course accidents can happen'. The quarry was a scent trail laid in fields stretching towards Tatsfield. The man who owned the dog kennels afterwards said that hunting a preset trail did not feel authentic. A clutch of about thirty hunt protesters taunted huntsmen with a banner saying 'It's over'.

## COCKFIGHTING

Another barbaric pastime from days gone by, cockfighting was popular among the town's charcoal burners, according to the *Croydon Guardian* in 1998. They met at the Greyhound Inn, which stood among orchards on the corner of Park Street. The brawling, cockfighting colliers lived in the Old

Town.

An article in the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1992 says that cockfighting was carried out at the Greyhound in Carshalton in 1723, with it advertised in the *London Journal*. The match was between the men of Putney and the men of Croydon. Is this a coincidence or have the two stories become muddled? This story is quite specific and is taken from a book on London's pubs by Young's, the brewers.



Falconer, Deen City Farm, Merton

## FALCONRY

A sport with a royal tradition, but still quite bloody and fatal if you happen to be the prey. Elizabeth I visited Croydon many times to see her archbishops, and enjoyed hunting, falconry, picnicking and watching horse racing at Duppas Hill. We still occasionally witness displays of falconry in the borough, but for reasons of animal welfare the prey is usually a meaty tidbit rather than a live rodent or bird.

## DEFANGING ADDERS

This one's not a sport, but a singularly cruel activity. The *Croydon Advertiser* in 1935 described how an old 'gentleman' called William Bryant used to walk the Shirley Hills and catch adders. He would then pull their fangs out and carry them around in his pockets. He would visit the Surprise Inn and ask people to put their hands in his pocket - 'Much excitement followed'.

## MARBLES

While the men of Shirley village are believed to have played marbles on a particular day, possibly Good Friday, until around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the game is still going strong in Norwood. Jeanette Le Bon and her teammates became national and international marbles champions at the home of marbles, the Greyhound Pub, in Tinsley Green, Crawley, in 1995. There were 20 teams from all over the UK. In 1998 the *Croydon Advertiser* reported how Jeanette played marbles every Wednesday at the Prince of Denmark. She and Simon Monahan had won the title of British Pairs Champions at the Greyhound in 1998 and were due to represent Britain in the world championships in Tennessee in 1999. Jeanette was quoted as saying that the tactics were like snooker - 'you make a break and try to knock off as many as you can'. There were tight rules - marbles must be glass or ceramic, and the larger ball used for shooting can have a diameter of no more than 3/4". The board is a 6-foot circle covered with silver sand.

## ROUGH FOOTBALL

Shrove Tuesday in Lent was the traditional day for mass football. The main Surrey towns where it was played were Dorking and Kingston, where magistrates tried to ban it in 1797. The

bills they posted were ignored, and various players were arrested and convicted at the assizes in Croydon. They were discharged by the judge and warned not to offend again. The players rather strangely interpreted this as vindicating their right to play the game, and it was later claimed that the judge had acknowledged an old charter that confirmed the privilege. The game was played the following year and three ringleaders were arrested. The magistrates read the Riot Act, but the prisoners were rescued by the mob. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the respectable participants who had helped preserve the tradition (mayors had traditionally kicked off to start the match) were losing interest, and mass football slowly died out.

Football violence came to the streets of Croydon in summer 2004 after the England versus France match during Euro 2004 and also after England was knocked out by Portugal. The offenders, mainly from Croydon, appeared before Croydon Crown Court. Some were gaoled despite having previous good character. Windows had been smashed in bars and people on the streets had been terrified by the marauding, drunken mob.

## QUIETER FOOTBALL

The *Croydon Post* in 1996 reported that the Christians at Palace group organized trips for youths from local churches to Crystal Palace matches. One of the group's leaders, Ian Wilkins, was quoted as saying that the Bible taught us to expect miracles, but hoping for a goal from Gareth Taylor against West Brom might be stretching things a bit far.

## TENUOUS FOOTBALL LINK

In 1966 heroic canine Pickles sniffed out the stolen Jules Rimet World Cup trophy in the garden of St Valery on Beulah Hill. It had been concealed under a hedge in the garden after being stolen from a stamp exhibition in Westminster Hall. David Corbett, Pickles' owner, was rewarded by the Football Association. Let's hope Pickles got his reward, too. For those that don't know, 1966 was the last time that England won the World Cup.

## TOURNAMENTS AND JOUSTING

Jousting is believed to have taken place near the present Tanfield Rd, on an ancient common which was called Taintfield, Teyntefielde and other variants. Duppas Hill has a long association with sport. Tradition has it that tournaments were held on the slopes until 1286, when William de Warenne (alternatively De Warren), son and heir of the Earl of Surrey, was killed. He was believed to have been slain by his enemies. William was buried in front of the high altar at Lewes. Tournaments were generally arranged in such a way as to avoid serious harm to participants.



Paladins at Morden Hall Park

The murderous tourney, its prequel and sequel can be summarized thus: In December 1286 Lord William, son and heir of John de Warenne (Earl of Surrey and Sussex), was slain in a tournament in Croydon, probably at Duppas Hill. John de Warenne had in 1269-70 been involved in a land dispute with Alan de la Zouche (alternatively Lord Zouche). De Warenne and his followers had attacked the Zouches at Westminster, leaving the father mortally wounded. De Warenne fled to his castle at Reigate, pursued by the incensed Prince Edward. De Warenne gave himself up, presenting himself at the archbishop's manor house in Croydon, and later submitted himself to King Henry's mercy. He was fined and pardoned, although many thought it a scandal that he wasn't punished. It is believed De Warenne's enemies brought about his son's death.

## RE-ENACTORS IN FRYLAND'S WOOD...

In January 2000 the Arriere-Ban organized a banquet of mediaeval food as the finale of a whole day of belated Twelfth Night celebrations. The *Croydon Advertiser* reported that the fifteen courses were what the merchant classes would traditionally have eaten. The re-enactors followed the tradition of the King and Queen of the Bean, a ceremony to find out who would sit at the top table and get the best of the bread (i.e. the upper crust). Cakes would contain a bean for the man and a pea for the woman. Another game had servants trying to flick doughnut-shaped cakes off antlers stuck to their heads. Twelfth Night traditions also included sporting competitions such as archery, but also a violent early version of football. In a game for children, one would be blindfolded and have to guess who had hit them. That's probably

banned now, too.

### ... AND IN ADDISCOMBE

The Addiscombe-based Paladins of Chivalry practise weekly at Beverly Hall in preparation for events across the country. Most of their reconstructions for the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century shows are based on real characters, and they put a lot of effort into costumes, armour and weaponry. They perform demonstrations of medieval dance and tourneys. While they try to recreate the flavour of the period, they don't speak in mediaeval English.



The Paladins' fair ladye

### ARCHIEPISCOPAL BANS

Archbishop Parker succeeded John Whitgift and continued the tradition of visiting the Old Palace. According to Lysons (1792), while in residence on one occasion Parker banned the reading in Croydon of the proclamation permitting sports and pastimes on Sunday. Is that where the term 'spoilsport' comes from?

*Lords of Croydon Palace* has a similar story for Archbishop Abbot with more historical detail. Abbot was in residence at Croydon Palace in 1618 when the Book of Sports was ordered to be read in churches. It was intended to allow sports on Sundays, but Abbot refused to

allow it to be read in Croydon church. King James apparently turned a blind eye, despite being so keen on sport that he allegedly encouraged horse racing in Croydon..

### OFF-TARGET ARCHBISHOP

This one involves Archbishop Abbot again, but doesn't take place in Croydon. In 1621 he accidentally killed a keeper with his crossbow while hunting on a friend's estate in Hampshire. This tragedy haunted him for the rest of his life. He fasted regularly in penance and handsomely recompensed the widow, whose newfound wealth soon attracted a new husband. The archbishop's enemies used the accident to try to have him removed from office, but they failed. However, some of his duties had to be taken over by other bishops. Memories of the killing were revived again towards the end of Abbot's life, when a crowd of angry women surrounded his coach on his return to Croydon Palace. When they were rebuked, they started shouting at him, daring him to shoot them with arrows.

### DISPLAY OF LASSO WORK

At the invitation of Sir Francis B Head, a famous writer of travel books who lived in Croydon, the Duke of Wellington, hero of Waterloo, visited Duppas Hill in 1827 to see an exhibition of lasso throwing by a South American. The story goes that a rider's spur got unfastened and Wellington fastened it for him.

### BEULAH SPA

Apart from the waters, entertainments included a camera obscura, a maze or wilderness, a lawn for dancing, minstrels, concerts, an archery ground, and firework displays. There was a military band playing from 11am during

the season for people who wanted to dance on the grass. It closed in 1854, when spas were no longer fashionable.

### CRYSTAL PALACE

Entertainments included dog racing, football, boxing, dances, dog shows and dirt-track racing. Firework displays took place every week, culminating in tableaux with portraits of English heroes and 'exotics'. After the 1866 fire which destroyed the North Transept, the Crystal Palace fell into a slow decline. However, there were still a lake with electric boat rides, prehistoric monsters, water chutes, a fun fair with the 'Hiram Maxim Flying Machine' and 'The Joy Wheel', reportedly a spinning wooden wheel that flung the riders off as it gathered speed. Sports days were held there by schools, and also scout rallies. There was a boxing ring; one boxer was Phil Scott, known as the 'Horizontal Champion' for spending most of the time out cold on the canvas. The first aeroplane flight in Great Britain was by one of the Wright brothers, flying from the old cycle track. There were also giant balloon events, a speedway, and children's concerts at Christmas.

### WOODSIDE RACES

The late Lilian Thornhill's excellent monograph *Woodside* says that the racecourse was built on land leased from Stroud Green Farm in 1866. The races attracted hooligans, thieves, muggers and card sharps. The last race was held in 1890 and the land was leased to Beckenham Golf Club. In 1950 the Ashburton Secondary Schools were built on part of the site, and the fire station and housing now occupy the eastern end of the race course. The races moved to Gatwick and later to Brighton, where there is still a race called the Woodside Stakes.

The racecourse was used to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee on 22 June 1887, with a procession of carriages bringing important citizens. Entertainments were laid on and 10,500 visitors attended. Woodside Station was opened in 1871 for the races, initially only opening on race days. The horses were brought by rail into a siding on the south side adjacent to Ashburton Park, then led from their boxes along the platform and up a ramp. A horse-drawn tramway running from Norwood Junction served the races (until 1889), with a depot behind St Luke's church and vicarage, but houses were built on the site in 1972. A forge serving the race horses and local horses was opened in 1861 at the east end of a row of cottages to the east of the Beehive on Woodside Green. It closed for good in 1937. According to *Croydon's Parks - An Illustrated History*, the race course was closed following pressure from the Mayor of Croydon who believed it attracted undesirables.

# CROYDON'S WATERING HOLES

**Croydon has had some infamous drinkeries over the centuries, and also a few pubs with mysteries in their histories. Nowadays a pub is more likely to be a venue for a ghost hunt and the attendant Orbfest than a den of iniquity, but back in the day they served weary travellers, highwaymen, a disreputable man of the cloth and pilgrims.**

Increasing numbers of public houses are being demolished, their custom taken away by the late-night establishments proliferating in the centre of Croydon. It has been suggested that historic pubs could be declared listed buildings in order to protect them, but this will come too late to save some of our best known pubs. However, in July 2005 the *Croydon Advertiser* featured an article on the town-centre bars that were closing as a result of changes to licensing laws and, presumably, the competition for heavy drinkers.

The 100 acre site marked out by the mediaeval crosses included all the inns, i.e. the George, the Three Tuns, the Catherine Wheel and the Greyhound. What differentiated these from the other drinking establishments such as alehouses and taverns was that they offered accommodation and were allowed to issue trade tokens. The inns helped the burgeoning town function, providing accommodation and services for visitors and forming part of the communications networks from medieval times. Much later some worked as part of the postal network.

Land Tax Returns from 1780 list eight inns and 17 alehouses. The inns were the Blue Anchor, the Crown, the George, the Green Dragon, the Greyhound, the King's Arms, the Three Tuns and the White Lion. Croydon is

said never to have possessed inns with national reputations. However, they did have extensive sporting connections: the Three Tuns had a bowling green, reputedly first laid in 1749. Others had livery stables for hunting and/or kept hounds. And still others had yet more unsavoury sporting connections.

## THE BADGER

This Shirley inn was used by the badger-baiting fraternity in days gone by. It closed around 1846.

## THE BEEHIVE

This pub in Woodside was popular with the cadets of the East India Company from the college in nearby Addiscombe. A building has stood on the site since 1843, and the pub was built in 1851. At one time there was a wooden horse trough in front, but drovers and their carts would constantly damage it. A granite replacement that also catered for people and sheep was given by a Mrs Downing in 1882, but it was later moved to the junction of Birchanger and Howard Roads to make way for the War Memorial.

The Beehive is one of the sites where North Wood Morris danced on New Year's Day in 1985.

## THE BLACK BEAR

This quaint heraldic name had been replaced by the more ordinary 'Beer

Shop' by 1851. It stood in King Street, Croydon.



The Black Horse

### THE BLACK HORSE

This Addiscombe pub was the first tavern to serve the people of Woodside. It probably dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the earliest record is from 1771, when an Elizabeth Wilson died aged 101. The 19<sup>th</sup> century building just demolished replaced a half-timbered building with a pond in front. The pub was popular with cadets from the East India Company. It closed in April 2004, despite a CAMRA campaign, to be replaced by flats.

### THE BLACK LION

The site of this inn was at 34 Surrey Street and an old bit can still be seen up the alley on the left.

### THE BLACKMORE'S HEAD AND THE GREEN MAN

Back in 1637 it was known as just the Blackmore's Head, but by the reign of George I it had acquired the longer name.

### BUNKER'S KNOB, ADDINGTON

My sole source for this story is *Coombe, Shirley and Addington*. This pub commemorates the parish constable (who died in 1853), who could usually be found at the Great Castle Hill when off duty, and this pub was renamed in his honour. William 'Bonker' Coppin used to make a bonking sound as he walked, from his club foot. Why the name changed from Bonker to Bunker, and where the 'knob' bit comes from, are not explained.

### THE CATHERINE WHEEL

The old inn, pulled down in 1760, catered for the pilgrims who passed through Croydon. In late 2001 the replacement establishment changed its name to the Crown and Pepper following refurbishment. One of Croydon's four crosses stood in an elm tree against Catherine Wheel Corner. Up to the time of Charles I the street was known as Catherine Wheel Lane, and it led from the ancient route through the Old Town. The hagiography of St Catherine says that she was tied to a wheel for her protestations against the persecution of Christians, and the wheel broke. She was a very popular saint in the Middle Ages, and her sign was that of the spiked wheel. Ironically, she was the patron saint of wheelwrights, who wouldn't have wanted their wheels to break.

According to an article in the *Croydon Guardian* in 1998, the inn was one of the less reputable public houses in Croydon. It catered for pilgrims, but also 'less innocent travellers'. It was regularly visited by highwaymen who would steal the purses of fellow guests.

## THE CHEQUER/CHECKER

This inn was actually owned by Archbishop Whitgift, but he only bought it so that he could build his almshouses on the site. It was established before the 14<sup>th</sup> century (but one source says it dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century) and was one of several in Croydon to be associated with the Canterbury pilgrims. The name is believed to derive from its functioning as a *bureau de change* for early travellers coming from France via Southampton and Winchester. When it was bought by Whitgift in 1595, the deal included a shop in Surrey Street and 13 acres of land scattered over the parish. One plot near Thornton Heath Pond was called Hangman's Acre. It was said in an article in the *Croydon Guardian* in 1998 that the Chequer was the rowdiest of the inns, with lots of brawls and people being killed on the doorstep.

## THE CRICKETERS, ADDINGTON

In 1798 one Mrs Howard, licensee of the Cricketers in Addington, was given money for supplying beer for men working on a bridge connected with the tunnel said to lead from buildings near the current Addington Palace (presumably the original Addington Place in those days) to Wickham Court. Despite this story, which appeared in the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1966, the existence of the tunnels is still a matter of some dispute.

The current building dates from 1844, and it stands in front of its Tudor predecessor, which was known as The Three Lions, from the Leigh coat of arms. In 1879 Archbishop Tait decreed that pubs on his estate should not open on a Sunday. This was not annulled until 1962.

For a while the pub went under the

name of the Addington Village Inn, but the Harvester chain bought it in 2004 and changed the name back to the Cricketers.

## THE CROWN INN

This was the site of a huge maypole, topped by a crown in Elizabethan times. It stood opposite the Whitgift Hospital on the west side of North End. It originally provided the principal endowment for the chantry in the parish church that was founded in 1443 and dedicated to St Nicholas.

Fishmonger William Page, who published his memoirs of Croydon in the 1820s, tells of the occasion when a mob of Croydon residents outside the Crown Inn booed and hissed George IV as he paused on his way to Brighton.

## THE DOG AND BULL

There has been a pub on this site in



The Dog and Bull, Surrey Street

Surrey Street since 1431, when it was known as 'Ye Dog and Bull'. Some claim this is the oldest pub in Croydon. This,

of course, commemorated the vicious sport of bull baiting. The present building is Georgian. According to a book published by Young's, the building next door was a brewery known in 1695 to be 'a very ancient brewhouse'. One of the owners of the pub was Nicholas Northorpe, who was executed for felony in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Jack Ketch, public hangman, is recorded as flogging a victim through Butchers Row from the gaol to the corner of Church Street and back. Ketch was infamous for botched executions, taking eight strokes to kill the Duke of Monmouth. In 1994 the pub was visited by the Prince of Wales when he met the Surrey Street stallholders.

### THE FALCON

The inn stood at the site of 72-74 Church Street, which was excavated in 1971 in advance of the construction of a branch of Sainsbury's. The inn was mentioned as providing accommodation in 1648, and stood by the Outer Gate of the Archbishop's Palace. It was owned by Nicholas Hatcher but was not mentioned in his 1669 will, so it had probably ceased functioning as an inn by then. It was demolished in 1720 and replaced by two houses and then shops. The excavators found a 'Nuremberg jetton' (the French spelling is 'jeton', while it was called a 'Rechenpfennig' in German) - this was a treasury counter minted in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, used in the calculation of accounts. It was made of brass and inscribed in German. They were very common throughout Europe, but this type was only made in Nuremberg.

### THE FOX AND GOOSE

The site of this Shirley pub was home to the annual Whit Monday fair. See 'Markets and Fairs' for more.

### THE GEORGE

The George stood on George Street, opposite the Whitgift Hospital, where the NatWest bank now stands. When it was built it stood on a dirt track, which followed custom by taking its name from the nearest inn. Old Croydon was 'well girded by gates', and by 1604 a gate stood at Whitgift corner and was known as 'George gate'.

Various skeletons, skulls and sundry bones have been found on this site over the centuries. It became notorious as the inn run by the legendary Old Mother Hotwater. In a legend associated with the Gunpowder Plot, conspirator Thomas Percy galloped through North End and stopped to ask directions at the George in an attempt to escape persecution. The inn is also mentioned in play called 'The London Prodigal', believed by some to have been written by Shakespeare, according to Bannerman in *Forgotten Stories of Old Croydon*. This vast coaching inn closed around 1780 and was demolished. Only the archway remains, in the alleyway opposite the almshouses.

Additional stories associated with this disreputable inn, published in the *Croydon Guardian* in 1998 as a reprint of an article from the 1950s by James Hodder, include some 'facts' I haven't seen anywhere else. Mr Hodder calls it the George and Dragon, but it's obviously meant to be the same establishment. Several duels were apparently fought in the meadow behind the inn, with the losers probably being buried on the site. Landlord Humphrey Wild was hanged by the Sheriff of Surrey on the gallows tree at Croydon Common for the 'wilful slaying' of Robert the Carter in 1490. His successor was arrested for harbouring 'pestilential rebels' and lost the inn. In 1570 it was

the scene of a bloody affray between some of the town's carters and a band of travelling horse dealers. Between 1604 and 1610 it was the 'headquarters' of William Clewer, vicar and (alleged) highwayman. The reputation of the inn got steadily worse from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and some people claimed it was a 'death trap for travellers whose mortal remains were reduced by boiling them in kitchen cauldrons'. An order was made by the country sheriff for the closing of the inn, and in 1820 it was pulled down after 500 years of discreditable existence.

### THE GEORGE INN (WETHERSPOON'S)

This revered name is now borne by a branch of the Wetherspoon's chain, not far from the original George Inn on George Street. In 1996 it advertised a Hallowe'en beer festival with beers called Crouch Vale Creepshow, Nethergate Nightmare and Hampshire Hellraiser.

### THE GLOBE

This pub in Old Town was demolished in 1970 to make way for road widening - Croydon got a 6-lane highway out of it. One reader of the *Croydon Guardian* in 2004 remembered how the publican gave his regulars an inscribed glass jug one Christmas. The baker's shop next door was said to be haunted - a 77-year-old reader's grandmother lived there and had all the internal doors taken off because they used to open regularly.

### THE GOAT HOUSE

This distinctive pub in South Norwood closed in 2003 and was demolished. I drank there once, so it's not my fault. The name comes from an old settlement and refers to the habit of

grazing goats there, i.e. on the edge of the old common. Another source says it is believed to have started as a hunting lodge in the Middle Ages. Anyway, the pub preserved the name for a while, and the railway bridge is still called Goat House Bridge.

### THE GREEN DRAGON

This is at 64-70 High Street. The original building was a coaching inn, the terminus for services to Purley and it was used by the royal mail. Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope and Charles Dickens visited. Its name may be of heraldic origin.

### THE GREYHOUND, CARSHALTON



The Greyhound, Carshalton

This is mentioned in a list of 17<sup>th</sup> century pubs in Surrey. The name is probably taken from the arms of the Gaynesfords, whose brass with 'three greyhounds courant, sable' is found in the church there.

### THE GREYHOUND

This inn at 17 High Street was Croydon's most famous coaching inn. It dated back to at least 1492 and was important in the town's social and

administrative life until a town hall was built in 1809. Its yard stretched through to Park Road. One of my sources says that Croydon was a centre for hare coursing, hence the inn's name - hare coursing was one of many distasteful blood sports. Horses were also kept at the inn for hunting. The establishment was moved to the other end of its yard when the St George's Walk shopping precinct was built in the early 1960s, but it later changed its name to the Blue Orchid.

### THE GUN ALEHOUSE

This inn is shown on a map from around 1823, with an orchard behind. It still stands on the corner of Old Palace Road and Church Street.

### THE HARE AND HOUNDS

This pub on the Purley Way stands on the site of the old general post office, haunt of the Croydon Monster in 1803. The post office stood on the site until 1816.

### THE JOLLY SAILOR

This inn on the canal gave its name to a railway station operated by the London & Croydon Railway Company. The station was later renamed Norwood Junction.

### THE KING'S ARMS/ GOODIES/GOODY'S BAR

This pub has changed its name so many times that it's difficult to keep up with it. Its other claim to fame is its involvement in a haunting case in the 1970s. The daughter of the landlord of the King's Arms gave her name to Katharine Street.

### THE KING'S ARMS

The pub in Market Street was once kept by the grandmother of John Ruskin,

who spent a lot of time with Lady Ashburton in Addiscombe. One source, however, gives the name as the King's Head.

### THE LAMB INN

This inn stood in the Addington Hills in a valley near the reservoir. The story goes that in 1830 there was a fierce fight between smugglers and revenue officers, excise men or dragoons here. Another source says that the inn stood there till around 1830. The *Croydon Advertiser* in 1935 agreed with this version, reporting that the inn stood in a deep valley in the hills until around 1830. It was a meeting place for smugglers. Boys and women used to look out for excise men and dragoons from the hills. Old tobacco pipes and knives were found on the site around 1877 and people carried out excavations in the (presumably demolished) hotel's cellar to see if there was anything left.

### THE LESLIE ARMS

This Addiscombe pub, which has stood empty for years, was once used for initiating new members of the East India Company college. Before it opened, the cadets used to drink in the King's Arms in central Croydon. It is a listed building but is suffering from neglect and has had squatters. The decor is said to be in the Arts and Crafts style.

### YE OLD FOX

In a complex poltergeist/reincarnation case from the 1930s, investigator Nandor Fodor and his fellow investigator took one Mrs Fielding, a Thornton Heath resident, for a drive. She asked them to stop when they were outside Ye Old Fox in Coulsdon. They sat down outside and she went 'vacant', saying she felt she

was being pulled up. Purple marks appeared on her neck and she told them that she had been hung on the green. She felt that, in an earlier life as a man of the church, he had been hung from a tree there for interfering with little children. Fodor believed she was obsessed with gravestones and churchyards, as if looking for a particular grave. He wanted to find out what caused the morbid fascination with death. She had said a huge black arm tried to strangle her in bed when she was six, maybe trying to silence her. Everything pointed to her neck, which tied in with a vision she'd had, and a feeling of falling into a dark pit. Disputes about methods of investigation meant that this confusing case came to a conclusion before it was ever solved.

### THE PLOUGH , BEDDINGTON

This pub is said to be near the entrance to a famed tunnel. Is the tunnel the same place as the caves said to have sheltered Paper Jack?

### THE RAMBLERS REST

In 1997 the *Croydon Advertiser* published a story claiming that 343-year-old Lucie Roper was haunting the pub in Chipstead Valley Road. The landlord believed recent renovations were to blame and brought in a psychic. The story mentions the legend of a secret tunnel between Chipstead Church, Rumbold's Castle and the Old Stagbury House, conceding that there was an alternative theory of medieval or Tudor sewers. The pub dog was frightened of a corridor. The psychic used holy water around a fireplace.

### THE RED DEER, SMITHAM BOTTOM

The last official hanging (let's hope we didn't have any unofficial hangings!) in Croydon was in 1749 near the inn at a site known as Gallows Green. The area was heavily bombarded during the Blitz in 1941.

### THE RED LION, COULSDON

This pub, former haunt of highwaymen, closed recently and was due to be replaced by an Aldi supermarket.

### THE RISING SUN

A public house of this name is shown at the northern end of the west side of North End on a map from 1823.

### THE ROSE AND CROWN

This is another public house shown on the 1823 map. In 1996 Croydon Ghost Walks led by Mike Baker set off from this spot in Church Street on Sunday evenings.



The Rose and Crown

## THE ROYAL OAK

This pub on Surrey Street used to celebrate the restoration of Charles II by hanging a sprig of oak outside on 29 May (Oak Apple Day). The site adjoined Oak Alley and the overhanging roofs of Butchers Row and was excavated in 1968. The results showed that the site had not been occupied before the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

## THE SANDROCK

Recently infamous due to an unfortunate advertising campaign, this Shirley pub has a long and equally infamous history. It was built in 1867 on a small eminence used at one time for public religious meetings. In 1875, 1876 and 1879 there were protests about the disorderly behaviour of people on Sunday excursions from London and it was refused a seven-day licence. The conduct that was frowned on included visitors dancing and singing in the road, 'wearing false noses', 'exchanging head gear with those of the opposite sex', 'chaffing' passers-by and removing branches of trees. Eight cottages facing the inn served teas and became known as Teapot Row. When the borough's bounds were beaten in 1876, the beaters stopped off here for lunch.

## THE SHIP INN

This 17<sup>th</sup> century inn opposite Millets on the High Street was originally called the Shipe (i.e. sheep). Presumably drovers drank there. Now the inn sign shows a ship, so this nugget of information is in danger of being lost. The Assizes stood opposite.

## THE SUN TAP

This was attached to the Sun Brewery in Shirley, opposite the Surprise Inn. It was a favourite of the East India Company cadets at the college in Addiscombe.

Local papers called it a 'disorderly place'.

## THE SURPRISE

This Shirley pub was named after an entomological event, which must be pretty rare. It appeared overnight in 1867, converted from cottages. The name refers to the rare Camberwell Beauty butterfly, which appeared in such large numbers around 1767 that it was called 'The Great Surprise'. It was known in the district towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and entomologists are believed to have drunk in the inn. The Sun Brewery that dominated the district stood opposite the inn until its demolition in 1892 after being bought by Page and Overton. The Surprise was also the haunt of the unpleasant William Bryant, tormenter of adders.

## SURREY DROVERS

The pub stood on the corner of Drovers Road and Selsdon Road. It was built in 1845 by the lord of the manor of Chelsham, E Hales, and served farmers, sheep drovers and cattlemen for around 80 years until the Croydon cattle market closed in 1932. It closed in 1935.

## THE SWAN INN

This inn was next door to the Chequer on the High Street. It was eventually demolished around 1889 to make way for an extension to Joshua Allder's store.

## THE THREE TUNS

The site of this inn and also of the old gaol is at the end of Surrey Street, where Ladbroke's is now. The stocks stood outside the inn, on the opposite side of the street. Grig the poulterer was put on the scaffold here in 1550.

## THE WATTENDEN ARMS, WADDINGTON

This 16<sup>th</sup> century pub stands in an ancient village a stone's throw from Croydon.

## THE WELL HOUSE INN, MUGSWELL

This has the post code CR5, so I'm including it. In a review in the *Croydon Advertiser* in 2004, it said that it was founded around 1564. It is all flint and hanging baskets, with low ceilings, beams, inglenooks, crannies and lots of clutter (dried hops, pewter tankards, pictures). The chief feature in the garden is St Margaret's Well or Mag's Well, which dates back to the Domesday Book and gave the Mugswell area its name. It is 100 feet deep. Sutton and East Surrey Water uses the well to regularly monitor the water levels in the aquifers that provide 85% of its supplies. Children apparently like to throw money down the well.

## THE WHEATSHEAF

This Thornton Heath pub had the gallows opposite on Gallows Green and also Thornton Heath Pond, both sources of many legends. It was a coaching inn, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is believed by some to be haunted.

## THE WHITE BEAR

A restaurant review appeared in the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1999 for the pub in Warlingham. The pub's new manager mentioned a ghost in the 16<sup>th</sup> century row of cottages that were knocked together to form the pub. Symptoms included a dog acting strangely. The manager heard a knock at the door after closing time and opened it to find no one there. When she went back in a huge log had been put on the fire and it was blazing.

# MARKETS AND FAIRS

**Fairs were often originally associated with festivals on saints' days, and in Croydon it was the archbishops who were responsible for establishing markets and fairs, granted by Royal Charter. As they developed, they became opportunities for local farmers to sell their goods to passing visitors.**

The Church played a major part in the development of Croydon, especially in the days when the town was dominated by the Archbishop's Palace. Many important churchmen stayed here, and the young Thomas à Becket is known to have spent time in Croydon in the household of Archbishop Theobald.

Croydon was still a modest village in the Middle Ages before the fairs and markets were established. Archbishop Kilwardby's fair changed things, and inns began to spring up. The area around the fair field and marketplace had the Cross Keys, the Chequer, the George and the Catherine Wheel. The Chequer is held to be evidence of visits by pilgrims, its name implying that money would have been changed there by foreign pilgrims making their way along the Downs from the harbour at Southampton to Becket's shrine at Canterbury.

The many fairs held in the relatively small town of Croydon are also put forward as evidence for large numbers of visitors. During the reign of Edward I, Archbishop Kilwardby obtained a grant in 1273 for a market to be held every Wednesday, then he obtained a further grant for a 9-day fair beginning on the feast of St Botolph, 16 May 1276. The next one came in the reign of Edward II in 1314 when Archbishop Reynolds obtained a grant for a Thursday market and a fair to be held on the 'eve and

morrow' of St Matthew's Day. The Edwards were good kings to Croydon, and Edwards I to III all visited the town. Another fair was instituted under Edward III in 1343, when Archbishop Stratford obtained a grant for a Saturday market and fair to be held in Middle Row on the feast of St John the Baptist, 24 June 1343. By the time Lysons was writing in 1792 only the Saturday market and the fairs on St Matthew's day and St John's day were still being held.

It is not known where Kilwardby's 9-day fair was held, but there is a record of a fair field in a 1493 survey. Part of that site is now occupied by the Fairfield Halls.



French sausages at a North End market

## THE MARKETS

The markets changed over the years. The calendar England used was eventually brought in line with the Gregorian calendar in 1752, and so the

St Matthew's Day fair slid from September into October. The market on the feast of St John the Baptist became the Surrey Street market, while the fair element was later renamed the Cherry Fair and was held in the first week of July. It was not abolished until 1852. The October fair became the Walnut Fair, possibly from around 1644. It continued as the Walnut Fair until at least 1915, but the 'pleasure' part of the fair had been abolished due to rowdiness in 1868. It is also said that the death of a young girl who fell from a swing at the fair contributed to its abolition.



Surrey Street market

What exactly was sold at the markets? Well, Croydon market was noted for grain, mainly oats. In the 1720s author Daniel Defoe described Croydon as a great 'corn market', again meaning oats. By the 1820s the Saturday market was divided among provisions, livestock and grain, all at different sites. William Page in *Recollections of Croydon in the 1820s* tells us that the provision market was

housed in Butter Market House in the High Street; the livestock market in Butcher Row opposite the Three Tuns; and the corn market in the Town Hall, which was then in the High Street.

No documentary evidence survives to substantiate a sizeable trade in cherries at the Cherry Fair in July, but there was a cherry orchard on Cherry Orchard Road until the railways came. *The Death of a Parish* claims that the fair celebrated the ripening of the fruit. The fair is believed to have been held in the Old Town, but the area became too congested. A child was killed by a swing in the 1840s and this may have hastened its abolition.

By contrast, material abounds in support of the trade in walnuts. The walnuts themselves came from Banstead, which was known to have 40,000 walnut trees, and also from Beddington and Carshalton Parks. The Surrey Archaeological Collections notes that it was 'an article of the popular faith that walnuts come in at Croydon fair' - interpreting this as meaning that Croydon was important for walnuts, and not just locally.

Surrey Street's earlier names were Butcher Row or Butchers Row, the Shambles and the Fleshe Market, all evidence that it was the centre of Croydon's meat trade. The row known as the Shambles was demolished in the 1920s to make way for an extension of Grant's store. The archbishop collected rent from the stallholders, and his reeve (or rent collector) lived on Surrey Street, in a house on the corner of Overton's Yard. The market still exists, but surprisingly it did not receive its first royal visit until 1994 when the Prince of Wales came to speak to stallholders. Since 1996 it has had permission from

the Council to trade on Sundays, too, like the rest of Croydon's shops.

While meat was sold in Surrey Street, the centre of Croydon also had livestock markets. There was cattle markets in Drovers Road, South Croydon, South End and Surrey Street itself.

In recent years the centre of Croydon has seen a number of travelling markets. Stallholders at these occasional events come from just over the Channel in France or from further afield, including Hungary. Goods on sale included a number of items already available in the borough, such as French cheeses and jams, but there was also a range of sausages, olives, tasty Hungarian snacks and ceramics and wooden toys unavailable elsewhere. Croydon's own markets are not alone in facing such imported competition, as French markets have become something of a phenomenon in England. It has to be said that the goods I saw on sale did not compete directly with what our Surrey Street stallholders had on offer, but a few disgruntled shoppers and stallholders voiced their opinions on whether or not it was A Good Thing and compared and contrasted the general friendliness of the stallholders. As I put the finishing touches to my 2005 version of this chapter I read that we could expect another French market in November and possibly a German Christmas market in December. Now that would be something.

Farmers' markets, too, have been trialed in and around Croydon. However, picking a site in one of the least affluent parts of the borough, New Addington, was never going to help ensure their establishment as a permanent feature on the calendar. The

stalls may sell local goods without the interference of a supermarket chain, but this is premium produce that attracts not only top prices but also an army of foodies.

## THE FAIRS

Fairs may have started as social and religious gatherings but, according to Berwick Sayers writing in 1925, they later became excuses for revelry, mumming, juggling, horse-play and maypole dancing.

A book published in 1834 'by the King's authority' and recording the country's fairs mentions the Walnut Fair on 2 October as being for horses, bullocks, toys, sheep and walnuts. Quite a mixture! The following two days concentrated on toys. The *Croydon Chronicle* described the Walnut Fair as a saturnalia as early as 1830. It certainly included sideshows that would be entirely unacceptable these days. These included booths exhibiting people with unusual physiques, whether very short, very stout or very tall. There were also pugilists, a dingy menagerie, 'wandering army of showmen', a livestock fair, and stalls selling oysters (not a luxury item back then). A document from 1840 describes Gypsy fortune tellers opening the Book of Fate if 'palmed' with a piece of silver. They are described rather unkindly as wrinkled sybils (fortune-tellers) and hags, but 'pharaoh's daughter' sounds a bit more pleasant.

The crowds attending the Walnut Fair became more difficult to control once trainloads of people started to come down from London following the suppression of the Fairlop and Greenwich fairs. And so it was banned. Being Croydon, the people demonstrated against the 1868 ban on the pleasure part of the fair with two

days of riots in which the houses of prominent businessmen were damaged.

Edgar Browne recalls his experiences of the fair in *Phiz and Dickens* (published in 1913), from a time when the 'pleasure' part was still important, at least for the town's poor. The main object of the Walnut Fair was amusement. There were still walnuts to be had, but there was also gingerbread, Aunt Sally, wrestlers, vanishing ladies, 'American Indians' said to be born and bred in Southwark, learned pigs, soothsayers, waxworks, a circus of jugglers and acrobats, and still a dingy menagerie. The special dish for the season was roast goose. The waxworks had a Chamber of Horrors showing 'sundry brutal but popular murderers'.

In 1985 the Walnut Fair was briefly revived. There was a procession of jugglers, morris dancers, folk singers and musicians to recreate the opening ceremony. An eight-year-old girl performed the old custom of carrying the symbolic 'key of the fair', accompanied by North Wood Morris and Penny Plain, Tuppence Coloured. The 'golden key ceremony' (using a 14-inch key loaned by local locksmith Tony Clare) launched six hours of family entertainment with craft stalls in Fairfield Halls, as part of the 5th Fairfield Folk Festival. Around 600 performers took part in the fair, which included an exhibition of Victoriana by the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society. Festival director Jim Lloyd wanted to draw attention to Croydon's history and strong local identity.

Some of these old fairs were replaced by new ones, but some of these have already died out. The Shirley pack from

the Local Studies Library in the Clocktower Complex reports that an annual fair was held on Whit Monday at a site on Wickham Road. It moved to the site of the Fox and Goose after this had been demolished around 1856. The fair was discontinued around 10 years later. The entertainments had included jugglers, strolling players, Merry Andrews (described as 'jester comedians'), climbing a greasy pole to win a pig, and that timeless classic, gurning through a horse collar. People had to make their own entertainment in those days!



Victorians at Crystal Palace, 2005

*Coombe, Shirley and Addington* reports that Shirley held an annual Mill Fair in September. The current mill is made of brick and replaces one that burnt down in 1854. When the Mill reopened in May 1995 as part of National Mills Day, celebrations were in order again, with theatre, juggling and morris dancing.

JC Anderson in *Parish of Croydon* mentions that a fair used to be held on Broad Green on 1 May. Upper Norwood held what was described as an Old London Fair in 1974, and the *Croydon Advertiser* covered the event. A one-off

fair was held in Thornton Heath during Wings for Victory week in May 1943 during the Second World War. It was aimed at raising money for the war effort. The gala week had side shows, a fighter plane, a 1000 lb bomb that would be dropped on Germany, bands, and an auction of gifts donated by traders. An annual summer show used to be held in Ashburton Park, Addiscombe, which in its heyday included illuminations and a dance band and was open till midnight.

In some respects Crystal Palace could be seen as one big fair. Attractions included peacocks in the grounds, a lake with electric boat rides, giant balloon events, a speedway, firework displays, children's concerts at Christmas, prehistoric monsters, water chutes, a fun fair with the 'Hiram Maxim Flying Machine' and 'The Joy Wheel', which was a spinning wooden wheel that flung the riders off as it gathered speed. That sounds too brutal to be fun. Sports days were held there by schools, and also scout rallies. There was a boxing ring; one boxer, Phil Scott, was known as the 'Horizontal Champion' for the amount of time he spent out cold on the canvas. The first aeroplane flight in Great Britain was at Crystal Palace, performed by one of the Wright brothers, flying from the old cycle track. Things didn't always go well: in February 1900 one of the Palace's elephants went on the rampage, smashing partitions, tables and glass walls. It killed a keeper and was shot.

All sorts of fairs still take place in Croydon and district. Each year we hold one of the country's biggest melas, an event celebrating Indian and other cultures. It is held in Lloyd Park, attracting huge crowds to the music and food. A medieval fair was held in Lloyd Park in 1995, with photos of a juggler

and a hurdy-gurdy man published in the local press. 2004 also saw a free music festival in the park, including a Cuban band.

Crystal Palace Park now runs an annual Victorian weekend in the summer with a variety of activities reflecting its history. These are advertised as including a guided walk round the top end of the park where the Crystal Palace stood, Victorian and Edwardian fairs, brass bands and so on. It is organized by the Crystal Palace Foundation with the Crystal Palace Park Rangers. When I visited it in July 2005 I spotted a number of people in Victorian costume, some pearly kings and queens, a merry-go-round, 'flying swingboats' and a wrestling ring. The children's entertainment was a bouncy dome and slide and a little train going round in circles. The side stalls were charities selling bric-a-brac and crafts, and a masseuse with an information sheet with information about massage in the Victorian era. I don't know if anything more 'Victorian' was planned for the weekend. Attendance seemed poor. It was unfortunate that it clashed with several sporting events, including not only the Wimbledon finals but also a children's sports event at the neighbouring stadium, and Bob Geldof's televised Live 8 concerts. It also wasn't promoted particularly well, certainly not in Croydon.

Parts of Croydon organize carnivals, which largely consist of floats driving through the streets. Being held in July, they often get rained on. The Croydon Carnival ran on and off, but finally pegged out a few years ago. Waddon began its carnivals in 1990 and had a successful carnival in 2005 with a World War II theme. Carnivals over the years have featured parades, entertainments

such as karaoke and a bucking bronco, and an outdoor concert at Duppas Hill. Yes, the parade in 2004 was rained on, but the maritime theme turned out to be appropriately wet. Let's hope the *papier mâché* octopus didn't suffer too much rain damage.

Unusually, a whole year of celebrations fêted the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Luke's church in Woodside in 1995-96, with events including a parish walk (otherwise known as beating the bounds), a fête, a harvest festival of talents, a remembrance festival and an anniversary service.

The Selsdon Country Show was cancelled in 2004 over health and safety concerns, which couldn't be resolved to the satisfaction of Croydon Council, strapped for cash as usual. Maybe it will be revived, maybe not. Until it is, we have lost a fair that keeps our city dwellers a little more in touch with country skills. Such as carving tree trunks with chain saws and quenching the flames threatening bales of hay. Other demonstrations and stands had traditionally included bees and honey, Anglo-Saxons, morris dancing, heavy horses, sheep shearing and so on, regularly attracting crowds of up to 20,000 over a weekend. A hot-air balloon festival planned to replace the Selsdon event was also called off at the last minute, because the site was a risk of turning into a quagmire.

# THE NORWOOD GYPSIES

**The gypsies made their home in the northern part of the borough over 300 years ago, but the encampment was gradually broken up following the Enclosures Acts.**

The fortunes of the gypsies were connected with access to the common land. They were poor and subject to vagrancy laws, relying on selling pegs, baskets and butcher's hooks made from wood collected locally. Generally they were regarded with fear and mistrust by local inhabitants. The Penge gypsies remained nomadic, often camping on Penge Common. The Great North Wood gypsies settled around what is now known as Gypsy Hill. So famous were the Norwood gypsies that a pantomime of the same name was staged in Covent Garden in 1777. The main families were the Lees and the Coopers; as they were believed rich, they were not held in such disrepute as poor gypsies in some areas.

It was a Cooper who wrote the 'Norwood Gypsy Fortune-Teller', a book of charms telling young girls how to find out who they would marry. This book was in great demand in all strata of society. The gypsies were so famous that the Prince and Princess of Wales and several companions took a carriage trip in 1750 to see the camp, as did Queen Victoria many years later. In his diaries, Samuel Pepys reports his wife's visit to the camp in August 1668 to have her fortune told. Unfortunately, the predictions are not recorded.

The most famous of the gypsies was Margaret Finch, the 'Queen of Norwood Gypsies', who died aged 109 in 1740 and was buried in Beckenham parish church. Her funeral was paid for by

neighbouring publicans, and she was taken to the church in a hearse with two accompanying carriages. The Gypsy Queen was described as withered, wild and grotesque. She had bony, claw-like hands, smoked a clay pipe and kept an emaciated terrier. She travelled the country for years, only spending her last 11 years settled in Gypsy Hill. When she died, she had been sitting 'on ye ground with her chin resting on her knees' for so long that 'her sinews [were] so contracted' that she had to be buried in a deep, square box.

A report published a few years after her death states that 'The oddness of her figure and ye fame of her fortune-telling drew a vast concourse of spectators from ye highest rank of quality, even to those of ye lower class of life'. She lived in a conical hut built of branches, at the base of an ancient tree, and it was there that great numbers of people visited her. A subsequent owner of the house in whose garden the tree stood renamed it 'Queenwood'. However, a less romantic version of the tale has her living in a small cottage. Margaret Finch was succeeded by her niece, Bridget, who died in 1768 and was buried in Dulwich.

Back in 1801 it was reported in the *Gentleman's Magazine* that persecution had reduced the numbers of Norwood gypsies. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Pollards Hill area of Norbury was still very wild, and a man writing to the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1960 recalled a gypsy camp there when he was a child.