

Hall Place, Bexley

A talk to the Eltham Society by Janet Hearn-Gilham
Thursday 6th May 2004

Janet Hearn-Gillham told the Eltham Society about Hall Place, the enchanting house and gardens on the banks of the River Cray in Bexley, now in the capable hands of Bexley Heritage Trust, an independent organisation.

Evidence of much earlier occupation of the area exists before the house was built in 1537 by Sir John Champneis, a Lord Mayor of London.

During the eighteenth century one occupier was associated with the infamous Hell-Fire Club; various tenants then rented the Hall and for most of the nineteenth century it was used as a school. In 1917 Lady Limerick took over and entertained on a lavish scale, guests including King George VI and Queen Marie of Romania. In 1935 Hall Place was sold to Bexley Council but Lady Limerick stayed in residence until her death in 1943.

During World War II American servicemen came to the Hall in a very hush-hush capacity, intercepting German telegraphic messages and relaying them to Bletchley Park's Enigma machine for decoding.

Apart from the buildings, the grounds are really attractive and include some magnificent topiary 'the Queen's Beasts', a beautiful eighteenth century gates, a sunken garden, and of course the river Cray.

After the war, Hall Place was briefly unoccupied, then again served as a school before becoming a Bexley Library. Now it is used for many events including Tudor Fayres, murder history trails, Shakespeare, musical entertainment and carol concerts; it also caters for weddings (including the ceremony); and a seventeenth century barn has been converted into a successful restaurant – an encouraging example of an historic building effectively serving the community.

