THORPE HAMLET HISTORY GROUP

Article 3 : ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE IN THORPE HAMLET

By Debbie Russell

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With the festive season and New Year just around the corner I thought about all the places we had to go to for a good night out in Thorpe Hamlet. We could boast about having 18 public houses once upon a time. They were thriving places where you could meet for a drink and chat on a night out or play in the darts team. Some pubs had crib teams and snooker teams. Cricket and football teams were popular and the yearly coach trip out to the seaside with the odd visit on the way back home to other hostelries.

If you worked at one of the big companies in Thorpe Hamlet you would of course be a member of the company social club. At this time of the year hundreds of employees children would attend the annual Christmas parties. Lots of games like musical chairs and pass the parcel followed by a party tea of sandwiches, trifles and jellies all washed down with gallons of orange squash! And before the mums and dads turned up to take them home there would be a flying visit from Father Christmas and a huge sack of presents for them. For the parents, there were the Christmas and New Year's Eve dances.

The social clubs that survive are now no longer in Thorpe Hamlet, Laurence and Scott's social club was the Gothic Club on Heartsease Lane which was demolished and a nursery school and a church was built on the land (the church burned down a few years ago). The Gas Works Social Club was once housed in the beautiful Chalk Hill House but was later moved on to Rowntree Way. The Railway Workers Social Club was on Thorpe Road and was latterly shared with the Taxi Drivers Association. This closed and the building was converted into flats.

There were many other places to enjoy leisure activities in the area besides pubs and social clubs. In the 1930s there was a bowling club on Cotman Road. In the 1970s, when the Crome and Stuart school was closed down, half the school buildings were converted to a sports and leisure centre. It had a gym, bar, hi-tech ten-pin bowling alley which attracted several teams and leagues. It was also an adult education centre as well, there were tennis and badminton courts and a playgroup which was enjoyed by many of the Thorpe Hamlet three year olds. Sadly, the Crome Centre was closed down and demolished to make way for the houses in Stan Petersen Close.

We did still have a bowling alley on Plumstead Road tucked behind the shops. Although it was old fashioned and you had to do your own scoring unlike the computer system at the Crome which did it for you! This was housed in an old building left from the pig farm on

the Valley Drive (before the houses were built). It was a rollerskating rink originally in the early 1960s and over the years this club became a venue for bingo as well. It is now the Wild Stallion Line Dancing Club and sometimes used for Zumba Dance classes for the more energetic members of the community!

Today we have the Canary Social Club on Thorpe Road, only 9 pubs and a new jewel in Thorpe Hamlet's crown which is the Café Britannia at Britannia Barracks. It is a thriving café during the day and now also does evening meals as well, with the stunning views of the city it can't be anything less than an amazing place to relax with a pot of tea and cakes. Well that's my trip down memory lane and with that I hope everybody has a peaceful Christmas and New Year however you celebrate it, with our best wishes from Thorpe Hamlet History Group.