

Sidlesham Heritage Trail

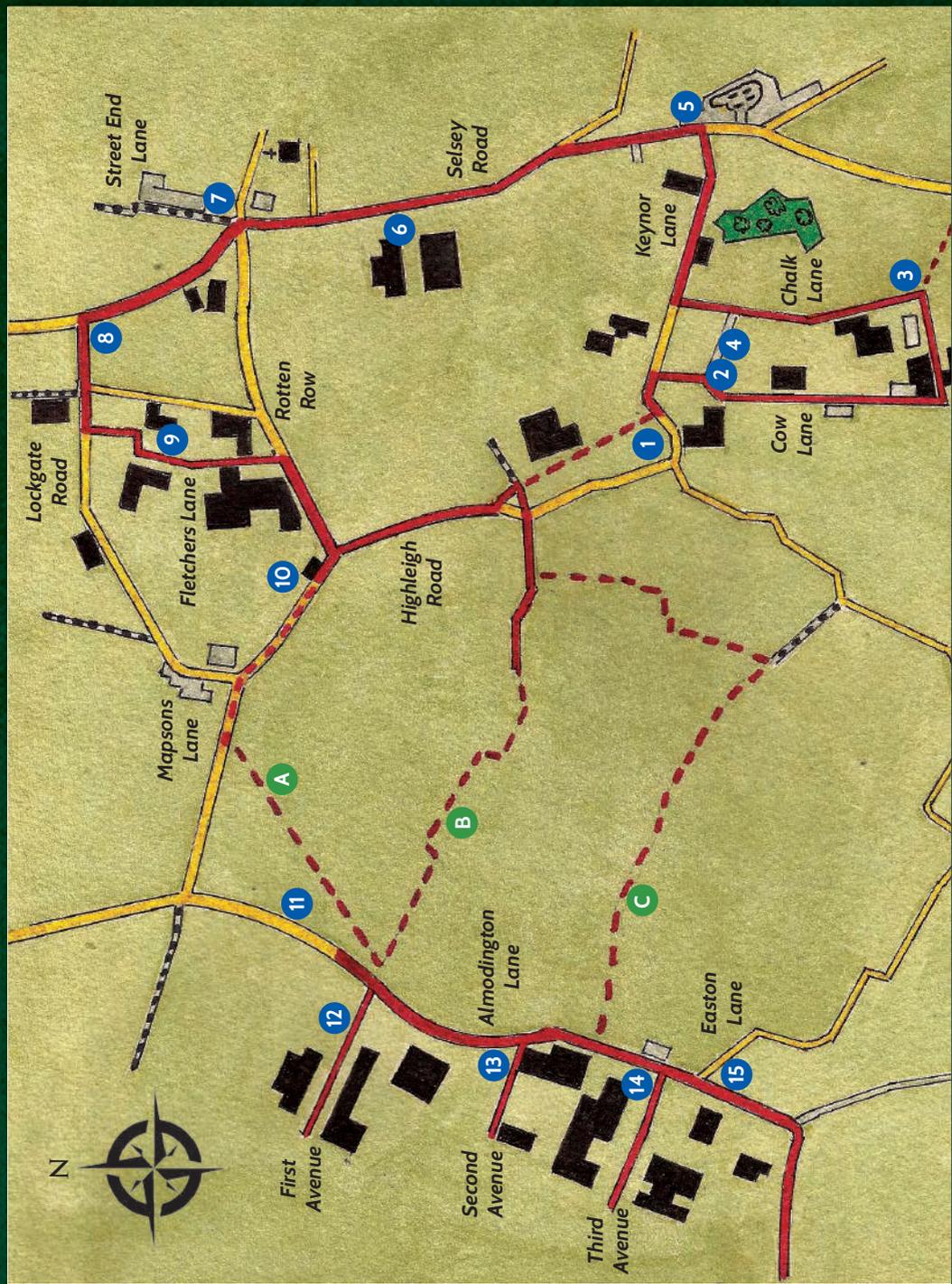
A Tribute to the Sidlesham & Batchmere Land Settlement Association

In 1936 more than 100 unemployed miners and shipbuilders moved from the North-East of England and South Wales to Sidlesham to begin new lives as market-gardeners.

The Sidlesham heritage trail commemorates the development of a Land Settlement Association as an historic national event and records its impact on the local area.



Written by Dr Bill Martin,
on behalf of the Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group





Introduction:

The heritage trail provides a guide to explore the development of the LSA in Sidlesham and Batchmere by visiting different locations which have been brought to life by the stories of the men and women who worked on the land.

The route around Sidlesham is a 5 mile circular stroll, taking about 2 hours, mostly on flat lanes, sometimes on narrow pavements. There are footpaths linking Sidlesham to Batchmere and Almodington, adding a further 4 miles to the trail. There are no pavements in Almodington.

Brief History of the Land Settlement Association (LSA):

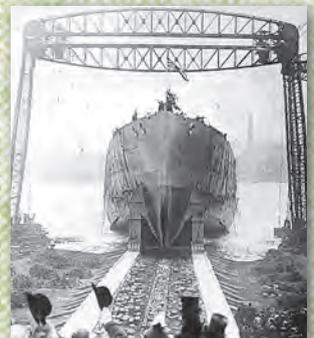
The Land Settlement Association (LSA), a government-supported initiative, was founded in 1934 at the height of the industrial depression under the auspices of the Society of Friends. It was established "to carry out an experimental scheme, with financial assistance from the Government, for the provision of rural small-holdings for unemployed persons from the industrialised cities". Over 1,000 unemployed miners and shipbuilders moved with their families to 20 different LSAs across the country. Sidlesham was the largest with 120

smallholdings. The ethos of the LSA was known as the three legged stool - breeding poultry, rearing pigs and market gardening. Each tenant was provided with a house, piggery, chicken battery, a glasshouse and 4 acres of land. Men, wives and children worked to produce eggs, bacon, fruit, vegetables and salad crops which were



harvested, collected, packed and marketed centrally. The LSA continued until its official closure in 1983 when a group of tenants formed their own company which traded until the late 1990s. Today most properties are in private ownership. A few independent growers remain, some using modern farming methods, others selling at the roadside. Many of the holdings have been sub-let, converted to different commercial uses or become equestrian facilities and three have award winning gardens.

Read more about the LSA on our website:
www.sidleshamheritagetrail.co.uk



Heritage Trail Route:

Whilst following this trail please remember that all the smallholdings are private properties and the owner's privacy should be respected at all times.

START: School car park - Post Code PO20 7NL (OS GR 978847)

The nearest bus stop (No 51) is on the Selsey Road near the junction with Keynor Lane (Location 5 on the map)

1 You are now on the Keynor Estate, land purchased for the LSA.

Opposite the school car park are two semi-detached LSA houses (Nos 1 & 2) built for £624 in 1935. Smallholdings were numbered sequentially (1-144, including 24 staff houses) across the

whole LSA and known initially by their estate number (eg: 2 Keynor) and later given names (eg: Numereuxdeux).

Primary school numbers increased from 120 to 284 so *"in 1937 a scheme for improvement was carried out including four large 'sunshine' classrooms"*. School records show several children *"returned to Durham"* or *"went back to Abertillery"* as not all the original tenants adapted to the new way of life.

"When they first came down I think Mum wanted to go back straightaway, but my Dad said if we go down we go down to stay and that was his attitude to it. But the ones who stayed said it was a hard life, but a good life". (Arthur Wilson (No 86) BBC Radio: From Grime to Groceries, 2001)



Walk east away from the school passing a row of cottages on the left.

Just before Cow Lane is No 39 with the name 'El-Es-Ay' where 'Darkie' Kemp an ex-shipbuilder from West Hartlepool arrived in 1936, the youngest of the early settlers at 28.

Turn right into Cow Lane and after a quarter of a mile you will reach Keynor House.

2 Keynor (Farm) House and 290 acres of farmland purchased in 1935 for £13,333 was one of three farms purchased by the LSA. It became the home of the LSA Manager.

"On our arrival at Sidlesham we were taken for supper at Keynor Farm House, where in a huge kitchen, the orderly of the week, Mr Rigg, a Sunderland man, and a jolly and happy man, was busily frying eggs, we were too late for the bacon. We had supper and made our way in the dusk to our new home. The trainees had put up the beds and some of the furniture inside, but left most of it outside. It was too dark to see anything but the shadows of our furniture stood outside the house. So ended our journey to a new life and tomorrow we would open our eyes to a new world as it certainly proved to be". (Mrs Amelia Littler - Tenants Newsletter 1964)



At the closure of the LSA Keynor House was advertised for sale in 'Country Life' (January 1986) with a guide price of £95-115,000.

Keynor Hut is located right of the main gate behind the

hedge. The original 'settlers' lived here during their training. Then it became a meeting places for tenants and later other villagers with a pre-school group, brownies and guides, parties, dances, whist drives and later Sidlesham WI.

"On Monday we are having our 'Husbands' Social Evening' so please all members turn up and have an enjoyable time and if at all possible bring along your husband - the more the merrier." (LSA Bulletin January 1960).

Pass No 3: Originally Keynor Propagation Unit where seedlings and young plants were grown and distributed to the smallholdings for planting by tenants.

Pass the entrance to Brent Lodge Bird & Wildlife Trust which occupies the site of the LSA stores and offices. Look out for traffic.

Pass No 7a: Haygrove / Sidlesham operates on 8 sites in Sidlesham, including 6 former LSA holdings, producing over 400 tonnes of strawberries and raspberries annually under glass and in polytunnels.

Pass No 7: Shipyard worker William Corner arrived in 1936 from West Hartlepool first building the roads, then becoming a tenant.

Continue down Cow Lane.

Look out for other LSA houses. Many have been extended and their original appearance altered, but most retain the distinctive mansard Dutch-style roof. You will see the remains of outhouses (piggeries & chicken batteries) as well as wooden and metal framed glasshouses. Most of the properties have footbridges over ditches leading to the front door.

Pass No 12: Dickie Cowan arrived in 1936 an ex-miner from Durham. He became Chair of the Tenants Association running weekly whist drives in Keynor Hut.

Turn left into Chalk Lane: Tonges Cottage, on the right, is one of several properties purchased as part of Keynor Farm used to accommodate LSA staff. Chalk Lane was constructed for the LSA, having previously been open farmland.

Pass No 15: In August 1956 Don & Freda Booth's chickens produced 315 dozen eggs which earned them £71.1s.4d and Penelope the pig had a litter of 20 piglets.

Pass No 17: 'Geordie' Forth also arrived in 1936 from Ryhope, south of Sunderland, an ex-miner at Silksworth Colliery. His wife and 7 children arrived six months later after his training.

3 As the lane turns sharply to the left notice a footpath straight ahead leading to Selsey Road and four holdings (Nos 18-21). Fred Ruckley, a miner from the Rhondda Valley arrived in 1939. His holding No 19 now has an award winning garden.

Continue left on Chalk Lane.



The first property on the right is No 22: John Bailey, a ship's riveter from North Shields arrived in 1937 and worked the land until 1947 when the family moved to Selsey. When John Graves arrived in 1952, qualifications, experience and finance had replaced unemployment as the criteria to join the LSA. John, a farm foreman in Yorkshire, who trained at Writtle Agricultural College, Essex, secured a 'start-up' bank loan with his £500 deposit. He was employed as a single man, unheard of in previous years when wives were interviewed with their husbands as 'women were in it too'.

Pass No 32: Bill Littler, an ex-iron moulder (shipbuilder) from South Shields, arrived in 1936. *"The seventh of August 1936 was a very special day for the family, after nine months of hopes and fears that we may not be selected at last we move on our way to Sidlesham in Sussex to commence life on the LSA. A life which was to last twenty-five years, a life of great hardship, many frustrations and disappointments, but above all great happiness and a sense of achievement. After six years of unemployment, one's morale is very low and we were determined to make a go of this venture."*



4 Keynor Farm (Industrial Estate) was the LSA Packing Shed, Stores & Offices. The LSA was a major employer in the area with both permanent and seasonal staff, including 120 tenants and staff across the estate. All produce was brought here to be graded, packed and sent to markets in London, Birmingham and Bristol. Tenants were not allowed to sell privately. 'Flogging' as it was known was an offence: *"He was selling more down the Highleigh Pound than was going to packing shed and he got his cards"*.

The stores stocked over 800 items including glass, fertilizer, wellington boots, tools and animal feed. Office staff managed tenants' accounts and marketing. The Packing Shed was also used for a badminton club.

Pass No 38: Lance Edwards arrived in 1936 from Elswick Colliery, Newcastle, with wife Anne and 7 children. His relations still live in the village.

Turn right at the T junction onto Keynor Lane.

Pass No 42: One of several vacant holdings during World War II occupied by American and Canadian soldiers.

Pass No 45: Acer Nursery - A single chalet style LSA house built at a cost of £300 by Stirland Builders (Birdham). The kitchen had a table top bath which adds a new dimension to 'bath night'. When the LSA closed in 1983 some growers experimented with unusual crops - 'queer gear' or 'funny fruit'. The present owners have developed a niche market producing courgette flowers for the restaurant trade.



5 T junction with Selsey Road. The Jolly Fisherman Pub and Combes Bakery were located to the right on Selsey

Road. Gnapps Stores where locals could order groceries for delivery, was in Mill Lane and the Crab and Lobster pub on Sidlesham Quay was a favourite watering hole for LSA tractor drivers.

Turn left onto Selsey Road, passing the Memorial Recreation Ground. This was originally to be the location for Nos 47 & 48, but they were not built. The land was sold to Sidlesham Parish in 1956 by the government for £25 on the basis that it would be used for sporting facilities and recreation. The LSA held Gymkhanas here in the 1960s to raise money for a new pavilion.

Continue along Selsey Road for about half a mile towards the village sign.

- 6** Just before the village sign, contrast No 50 (Kibblesworth) with its near original house, piggery and chicken battery with the modern glasshouses of Jakes Nursery (No.51). Four acres of glass, some 5.5 metres high, with 50,000 plants which produce 1.4 million punnets of tomatoes annually. The nursery has gas turbines, CO₂, rockwool, recycled condensation and the latest computer systems which enable the grower to monitor the well-being of the plants, even whilst on holiday. You are now on Fletcher's Estate (Nos 49-89). Jack Dixon (No 50) arrived in 1938 having been a 'horseman', working with pit ponies at Allerdene Colliery, near Gateshead, then unemployed for thirteen years. His brother Fred was next door (No 49).



Pass No 52: Norman Slaymaker now lives in the USA and keeps track of his former property on Google Earth!

Pass the petrol station which was Landers Garage in the 1950s.

- 7** Opposite the Grey Stag Inn (formerly The Anchor until 2015) is Rotten Row (Nos 58 & 59). The field on the corner was Fletchers' propagation unit. The LSA Property Manager, Lew Issacs, then John Smart, lived at No 58. Church Lane by the side of the pub leads to Nos 56 & 57. Directly ahead are Nos 61-68 in Street End Lane. Bill Bushby (No 68) arrived in 1958 and organised sea scouts on his holding for 20 years. His son Richard took over in 1980 and the gardens including a fantastic maze have been open the first weekend in August since 2002 raising over £20,000 for charity.

Cross over Rotten Row and continue on the pavement by the side of the main road.



Pass Street End cottages on the right. These were LSA staff properties originally accessed directly from the main road. Nearby is Street End (Farm) House. 181 acres of farmland were bought in March 1936 for £9,100. The adjacent converted barn was originally a packing shed for the Fletchers Estate with stables for shire horses before tractors. Later the barn became the maintenance yard for a team of workers undertaking repairs to LSA houses, outbuildings and glasshouses.

Turn left at the next road junction onto Lockgate Road.

8 This is Dyers Corner named after Elsie Dyer who had a corner shop here in 1938 which then became a grocers and Post Office. Dink Atkey built the garage in the 1950s and Fred Stacey had a forge making steel framed glasshouses for the LSA. Opposite the telephone box is End Lane (No 69 & 70). There was a sweet shop here where local children could exchange ration book tokens for 4 ozs of sweets every week. No 70 was originally another propagation unit for the Fletchers Estate.

"The arrival of the LSA brought a welcome boost in business for local blacksmith Fred Stacey who developed a sturdy line of tractor-drawn trailers to replace the wooden horse-drawn carts used previously and later turned his hand to making steel-framed glasshouses which replaced the wooden framed dutchlights."



Stay on Lockgate Road, ignoring the sign to Highleigh & Ham, and turn next left into Fletchers Lane. Face on-coming traffic.

Most of the holdings on Lockgate Road (Nos 71-76) are still working nurseries. You will notice more footbridges over ditches leading to the properties.

9 The LSA bought Fletchers Farm, but not the farmhouse (on the right). A Youth Club and Womens' Club met in a hut situated by the bend (on the site of Willowdene) and another building housed offices.

"Ladies are you fed up with side-shooting tomatoes. Well have a break and visit Fletchers hut for a cooking demonstration. You may even learn a new recipe to use up those tomatoes".

Fletchers Lane was built for the LSA. Jos Aitchison, a tram driver from Wallsend, Newcastle, was a road builder who stayed on as an LSA worker, living initially in No 77.



Pass No 82: Charlie and Mary Rowe arrived in 1958. Charlie who had been a farm manager in Kent, became a keen member of Chichester Camera Club and it was his collection of photographs which provided the inspiration for this heritage trail. Another wonderful garden which has been open to the public.

PassNo 84: Henry Grimes, a miner from Tredegar in the Rhondda Valley arrived in 1939. On the eve of his 70th birthday a hurricane struck destroying his glasshouse. The Chichester Observer (10th January 1956) reported *"The worst thunderstorm to hit the area for twenty years roared on Tuesday night through Sidlesham 'the smallholders village' wrecking thousands of pounds worth of damage to greenhouses and farm buildings."*

Pass No 86: Not the original house.

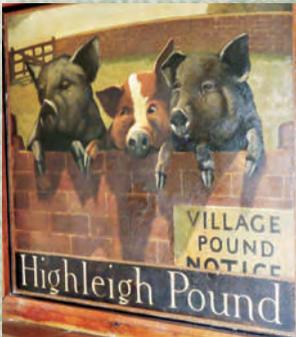
John Wilson, a miner at Harton Colliery in Jarrow arrived in 1939. His son, Arthur, was on national service in Germany at the time of the 1956 storms and was granted compassionate leave to return home and help repair the glasshouses! In addition to chickens and pigs, some

early tenants kept other livestock for personal consumption like Mrs Wilson, Arthur's mother, who kept Flemish Giant Rabbits.

Pass No 87: Thomas Newton arrived in 1939 from South Woodbine Street in South Shields, a railway and dock worker he sold tips at a racecourse to earn extra money. The family came down on the same train as the Wilsons (No 86)

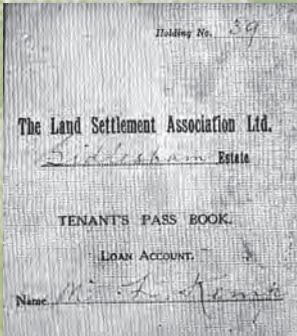
Pass No 88: During World War II agricultural workers were exempt conscription, but several LSA tenants joined the Home Guard which was based on this holding.

Turn right at the T junction at the end of Fletcher's Lane and continue until the next junction with Highleigh Road. Look out for traffic.



10 Highleigh Pound was the 17th century Pound Inn, a local for the earliest LSA tenants who used footpaths across the fields from Lockgate Road and Almodington. Sidlesham FC played on a pitch nearby. The teams changed in the pub until it closed in 1953.

To return to the school car park Follow Highleigh Road, signed to Highleigh and Ham. Take care here as you continue on the right hand side of the road facing on-coming traffic. As the main road bears to the right, fork left onto a gravel lane (leading to Duncan & Davies Nursery) and after passing through metal gates turn right immediately onto a path leading between a house and a wooden fence. Pass more nurseries on the left back to the school car park.



Alternatively continue to The Batchmere Estate using the footpaths (A or B on the map) or if travelling by car, parking is available in First Avenue. Take care when walking on Almodington Lane as there are no pavements.

11 You are now on the Batchmere Estate. In 1936 the eastern side of Almodington Lane was in Sidlesham and the western side in Birdham, both becoming part of Earnley Parish in 1976.

Batchmere Hut stood on the site of Woodlands. Activities included Cubs, Scouts, Woman's Bright Hour, WI monthly meetings, Library, Friday Youth Club, Women's Club, Whist Drive and Young Wives. An adjacent building was used for Christian Fellowship and as a Sunday school. Both huts were in use until the end of the LSA.

"I remember an evangelist used to drive round the estate with a loud-hailer stuck out the window crying "Calling all boys and girls" and inviting them to come to Batchmere Hut for an evening's praising of the lord."

Either side of the Batchmere huts were two LSA houses occupied by managers who played key roles on the estate.

No 143: Peter Farley was Livestock Manager, in charge of poultry and pigs. When livestock was phased out in the late 1960s Pete managed the stores at Batchmere and also had responsibility

for hiring casual staff, including students from Chichester College and inmates from Ford Prison. No 144: Godfrey Shirt was Service Department Manager with responsibility for lorry and tractor drivers as well as central services, such as rotavation and soil sterilisation, offered to tenants.

Continue south along Almodington Lane.

12 First Avenue (Nos 94-108)

The cottages on the left were previously stables and barns for Batchmere Farm. Early on shire horses transported the produce from the smallholdings to the Packing Shed next door. Later the barns were used for agricultural equipment which could be hired by the tenants and the wooden building was the stores. The field at the rear of the buildings was home to Batchmere Football Club where *"players used to change in the stables and wash in the horse trough"*.



No 100: Karl Holly arrived in 1938 from Tredegar, having previously been a miner in the Rhondda Valley. His wife Edith and 6 children arrived three months later. They had 6 more children - no wonder the school needed an extension!

No 107: Ernie Boxall arrived in 1966. At the closure of the LSA in 1983 he became Chair of Sidlesham Growers, which was established as an independent company with 89 of the former tenants.

Continue north on Almodington Lane passing Batchmere (Farm) House, on the main road, next to the barn conversions.

The farmhouse and 307 acres of land were purchased for £11,500 in 1936.

Pass No 109: This was the Propagation Unit with three acres of glass, initially for the Batchmere Estate, then for the whole LSA, amalgamating with those on the Keynor and Fletchers Estates. It was managed by Don Wells from 1952 until the closure in 1983 when it became privately owned as Almodington Nurseries.

"In 1962 the total celery order was for 370,000 seedlings". (LSA Bulletin No 705, April 1962)

13 Second Avenue (Nos 111-118) All three avenues in Batchmere were built for the LSA.

Anthony Dungey (No 114) was editor of a Tenants' Newsletter in the 1960s. In 1965 Vivienne Bartkowiak (No 104) wrote an article describing how one of her chickens laid an egg weighing 6.5ozs. It was 3.5 inches long and 8 inches in circumference and she challenged other tenants to "Beat This".



14 Third Avenue (Nos 119-129)

No 119: John Henry Aston became Chair of both the Local and National Tenants' Associations and was awarded an MBE in 1953.

No 128: In 1977 Derek and Phyllis Howell moved all their 1.5 acres of glass using a small tractor and trailer to Tawny Nursery in Bell Lane, Birdham. *"My dad had me straightening the nails for reuse in the reconstruction of the Dutchlight glass . . ."*

... a very nice place to grow up with some fond memories”.

Continue on Almodington Lane until the junction with Easton Lane on the left.

15 Easton Lane (No 138 & 139) At the start of the LSA there was a General Stores here. When this closed “it was across the fields to stores at Somerly or Birdham or cycle down the lanes to leave your bike by the ditch before catching the bus into Chichester. The nearest pubs were across the fields to the Pound Inn at Highleigh or The Bell at Birdham which also had a hall where weekly dances were held with a piano and drums for music.”

Stay on Almodington Lane to reach No 130: The LSA piggery was where sows were brought to meet the boar. Male piglets in the litters were fattened up on the smallholdings before being taken to Chichester Abattoir (by A27 Stockbridge Roundabout).

Further along Almodington Lane to Earnley is No 133: Henry Cloud, a boiler maker from Palmers Shipyard in Jarrow arrived in 1937 and in 1942 he was awarded a certificate for ‘Best Kept Holding’. After the closure son Sydney converted the holding to ‘Earnley Butterflies, Birds and Beasts’ and in 2015 fourth generation, great grandson, Ben (Millstream Productions) joined the heritage trail project to make a film in conjunction with The Novium Museum in Chichester.



Return to Sidlesham School car park using footpaths B or C on the map.

We hope you enjoyed the heritage trail. If you have any feedback and/or would like to know more about the Sidlesham and Batchmere LSA please visit our website: www.sidleshamheritagetrail.co.uk

Additional information:

Find out more about the Sidlesham & Batchmere LSA and the heritage trail on our website:
www.sidleshamheritagetrail.co.uk

The trail can be used in conjunction with OS Explorer Map 120.
Refreshments can be purchased at a public house & a petrol station on the route in Sidlesham.

Whilst every care has been taken in compiling this trail the author cannot accept responsibility for inaccuracies. At the time of publication all of the routes are along public rights of way or other paths over which the public has undisputed access. Car parking is entirely at the owner's risk.



Acknowledgements:

The trail is dedicated to all the LSA tenants, staff and their families who shared their stories to bring the heritage trail to life. Special thanks to Val Gatehouse for her contribution to the research and for enabling a relative newcomer to appreciate the impact of the LSA within the village.

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Other Heritage Trail and Walk Publications:

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- All Aboard - Selsey's Love Affair with Railway Carriages.
- Walks around Sidlesham
- A Sense of Place Walks: East Beach Amble; Seaside Stroll; Tracks, Trees and Tees; Beyond the Sleepy Lagoon; Tales of the Medmerry Marshes & Walk the Selsey Tramway.

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