

First Published in Great Britain April 1994

ISBN 0 9523784 0 X

By the Horton Kirby and South Darenth Parish Council

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Material for this book has been collected during 1993. All references to the present should therefore be taken as the end of 1993

Designed and typeset by The Talbot Partnership, Horton Kirby  
Printed by Hackney Press, London

**Front cover photographs:**

*Top left:* River Darent at Westminster Fields

*Top right:* South Darenth Village Centre c1905

*Bottom left:* The Street Horton Kirby

*Bottom right:* Watercress Beds, South Darenth c1905

# Horton Kirby and South Darenth

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## Pictures and Memories of 100 Years 1894 - 1994

*Quote from Edward Cresy 1857*  
*“Memorandum relating to my tour round the parish and reminiscences of the past which I implore every well-wisher of his homestead to chronicle for the benefit and amusement of those that may come after him.”*



Logo designed for  
the Centenary Year by Sharon Canfield

As “well-wisher of its homestead”,  
the Horton Kirby and South Darenth Parish  
Council has commissioned this book to celebrate the  
100 years of its existence since 4th December 1894.  
It is dedicated to the people of this parish past,  
present and future.

# Foreword

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All Parish Councils came into being as a result of the Local Government Act 1894 which received Royal Assent on 4th March.

This Act of Parliament took a year to pass, excited much controversy and Gladstone's government had to deal with over 800 amendments. Obviously parish councils weren't wanted! The uproar was caused because local government in the 1820s had been notoriously inefficient and corrupt. Fifty years later it was still inefficient and extremely complicated. Indeed the confusion was so spectacular that it required twenty years of legislation and experiment to sort it out.

However, Parish Councils had arrived and took over from the Church's Vestry meetings which had directed the civil obligations to the poor and needy together with the religious obligations of charity.

The Parish of Horton Kirby (to become the Parish of Horton Kirby and South Darenth in 1978) became a reality by holding its first meeting on 4th December 1894.

The present Parish Council considered several ways of celebrating the Centenary including commissioning a pictorial village sign for each village, distributing commemorative mugs, and planting a centenary wood. All of these, though worthy, were not considered to be as exciting a prospect as compiling a book of photographic and written memories of the past 100 years; something which could be kept as a memento to be taken into the next 100 years. I hope you agree that this has been worthwhile.

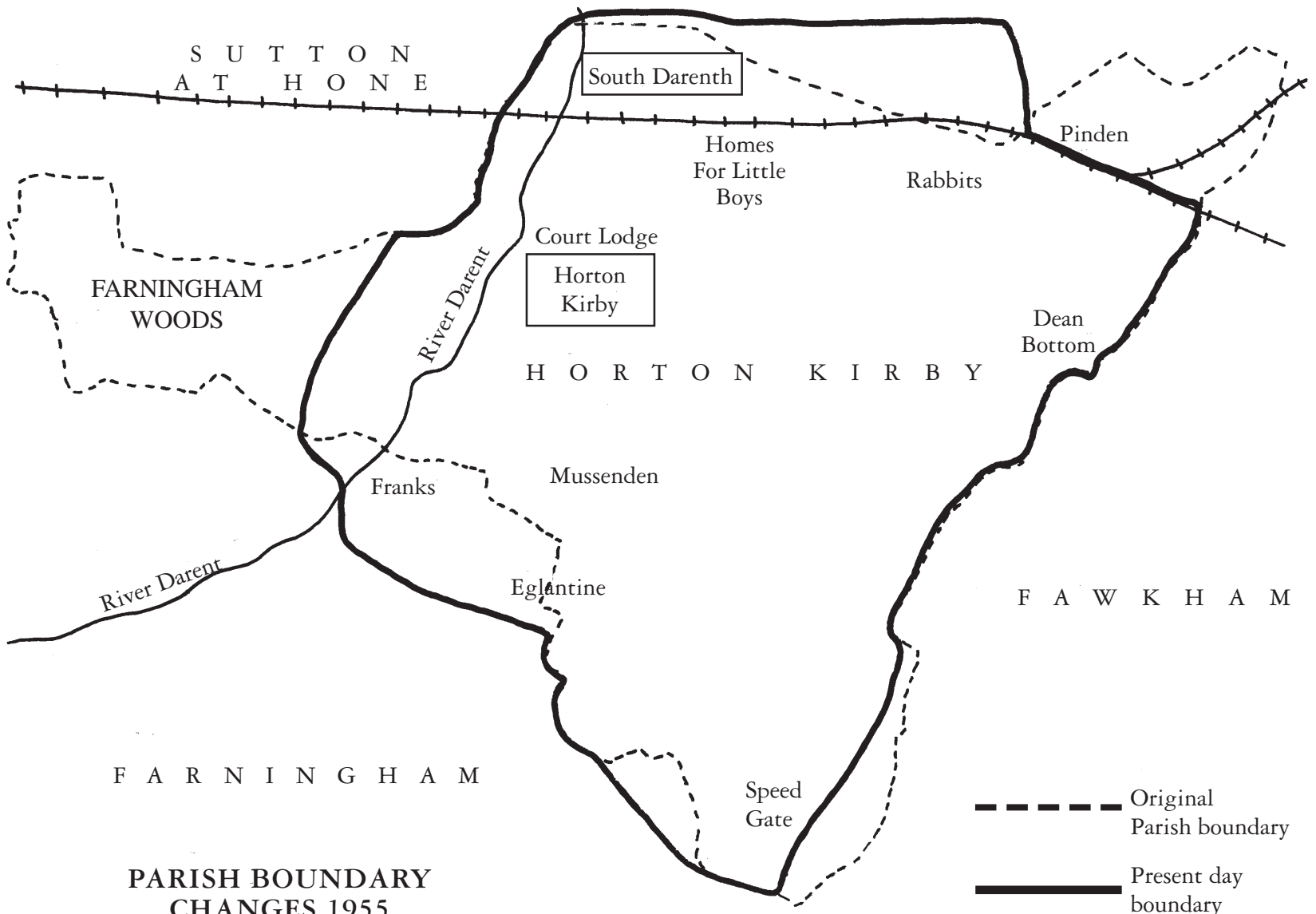
I would like you to join me in thanking the dedicated team of volunteers who have compiled this book and without whom it would truly not have been possible. I believe that they all found it stimulating, interesting and fun. We hope you agree that the end result is the same.

*Carol Allart*  
*Parish Clerk*  
*Editor*

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PARISH BOUNDARY  
CHANGES 1955

*Map drawn by Terry Moyle*

# 1 • From Early Times

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Although this book concentrates on the events of the past 100 years, it was not felt to be complete without a brief reference to early days.

Horton Kirby and South Darenth have developed as communities along separate and distinct paths. Evidence of human settlement in the Darent Valley dates back at least 5,000 years and includes sites of Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age peoples. The Valley was fully exploited for the first time during the Roman period when large villas, forming major farming units, were built throughout the Valley. The Darent provided a means of transporting substantial quantities of farm produce for the towns and garrisons of Roman Britain. This was mostly wheat and cattle from the meadows and slopes in the Valley. Many Roman sites have been revealed over the past 200 years with the major Roman Villa granary being found at Westminster Field in 1972.

Evidence of Saxon habitation in South Darenth and Horton Kirby is equally plentiful. Burial grounds have been discovered at Riseley, near Eglantine Lane, at the Farningham Home for Little Boys and at the top of New Road, South Darenth. During the early part of the 20th Century, this last area was commonly referred to as the “Boneyard” and was regarded as the poor part of the village.

The Domesday Book provides more detailed information of the area after the Norman Conquest. It records the village of “Hortune” (rather unflatteringly meaning “mucky place”!) as being divided into four manors, Court Lodge, Reynolds Place, Franks Hall and the hamlet of South Darenth. The Normans built a castle on the banks of the Darent (now a part of Court Lodge Farm) and St Mary’s Church was built about 100 years after the Norman period. Edward Cresy (a local landowner, architect and historian), writing in 1857, suggests that originally a moat entirely encompassed the castle. In 1291, the last

female member of the Norman de Ros family, married Roger de Kirkby from Lancashire and the village took the new name of Horton Kirkby (changing eventually through usage to Horton Kirby).

During the Tudor period, Horton Kirby continued to prosper. Franks Hall was built on its present site after the original building on the other side of the river was abandoned, possibly because the land there flooded too easily. The existing building, on higher ground, was visited by Queen Elizabeth I. The Royal Oak, in The Street, and Old School Cottage are among other buildings built at around the same period.

By the late 1700s South Darenth consisted of only a few buildings. There were four scattered farms, two flour mills and a blacksmith’s forge. At one time there was a chapel on land opposite The Jolly Millers, although it was later converted into a Malt House. Giffords and The Towers (Cresy’s home), were built during the early part of the 19th Century but it was the Victorians who had the most profound effect on the development of South Darenth and the way it looks today. The expansion of the paper mills and the coming of the railway, transformed the village and caused its sudden growth. In comparison, Horton Kirby was relatively unaffected by the Industrial Revolution and, despite many new housing developments during the last 50 years, retains many of its original buildings.

The people who live here today no longer rely solely on the mills or the land. With Green Belt land under constant threat, particularly from commuter belt development and the proximity of the East Thames corridor, both communities are likely to continue expanding. For some, the future evolution of South Darenth and Horton Kirby is regarded with apprehension, but most are happy to live in what are still happy, friendly, thriving communities.