

*This account was written by S K Hayward who took charge of Wey House, the orphanage situated in Wheelers Lane, together with Miss Sherlock in 1948.*

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Here are briefly, a few details of Way House:

Founded 1859, but actually opened in 1858 – by the Hon. Mrs Way who then lived at Wonham Manor, Betchworth. She had an interest in the St Marylebone Workhouse (as then called in London) and felt she would like to help as far as she was able, girls from the Workhouse. It is not clear whether she bought a newly built cottage in Wheelers Lane or whether she had it built for the purpose, but the end part of the premises (nearest the church) was the original Home and if you look at the side of this part of Way House you will see the date let into the brickwork up near the roof.

She began by taking 8 girls out of the workhouse – bigger girls – and placed them in the cottage in Wheelers Lane with a Matron in charge of them, and they were trained for domestic service and given a happy and Christian home-life, and when they left they were outfitted and found a good position in what used to be called “good service”. They were orphans as well, the children were in those days who were brought up in the Workhouses, and when the time came for any one of them to marry, Mrs Way and her helpers played the part of a good mother and saw they were happily and satisfactorily settled.

Very soon the number of girls accommodated rose to about 18 in the second year, and they were all girls, and old enough for training.

1872 – The Nursery Home added. The part of Way House at the other end and on a different angle was built in 1872 and was for a time separate (this is now No 4 Way House). This was a Nursery home for little ones and story goes that Mrs Way’s daughter Minnie, on becoming 21 years of age, told her mother she did not want a lot of money spent on her, but would like it used to establish a Nursery Home, and this, apparently was done. There was a beautifully bound purple leather bible with details of the opening of this nursery home by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, but I do not know what has happened to it. I think the Vicar had it and kept it in the church vestry. The date 1872 can be seen on the outside of this part of the Home.

At some time, and I believe it was round about 1900, the 2 cottages were joined up so that the Home would appear as you would remember it and before the developers separated that end again in the re-development into 4 private residences in 1970-2. Up until the end of the First World War, I imagine, the residents were orphans and girls.

With the rapid development and change in social conditions, girls of other categories than “orphan” were accepted, especially from the end of the First World War onwards, but the criterion of “homeless” still had to obtain, and no child was accepted who could be provided for by relatives or friends of any kind – e.g. there could be children from broken homes, or children suffering from bad conditions that have removed them from entirely unsuitable homes, or more increasingly as time went on illegitimate children whose mothers were not in a position to look after them, and so on.

Up to the time that Miss Sherlock and I took charge of Way House, girls only had been accepted, but we felt a number of smaller boys could be taken according to the number of beds that could conveniently be allocated and we did, as you know, have about 7 boys among our number, which meant that a small mixed family could be admitted, thereby preventing separation of brothers and sisters.

Also, up to the time that Miss Sherlock and I came to Brockham, the home had no specific name. It started off as "the Brockham Home" and just stayed "the Brockham Home". But we felt it would be helpful for the establishment to have a name that would not necessitate the children past and present to have to give a Home in their address. Enlightened as the public feels itself to be there is always some reaction when people know a person has been brought up in a Home, even though the home life of that person has been happy and full and far better than might have been the case if they had not come to us. So the name of Way House was decided upon which serves the purpose of a non committal address and also remembers Mrs Way, the founder. This was done before there was any number to the houses in Wheelers Lane, probably about 1949.

Way House was always a private and independent Home and it has always kept well abreast of the social conditions of the time. We feel it has a history to be proud of.

Re: name – It has occurred to me that you may remember Way House as "the Brockham Home Training School", but this title obtained for a very few years only, Miss Couchman, in her time (my predecessor) attempted to vary the name of the Home in this way, but we never liked it. We felt it indicated a place of correction or training of difficult girls or some such thing and we are sure it must have given some wrong impression.

This is only a very brief sketch of Way House but if there is any specific aspect of the home and its work which you would like information on, do not hesitate to contact me – I should be delighted to help if I can. I feel the wonderful work done for 111 years is worth recording and remembering.

The Home finally closed in 1970

S K Hayward