

## SYDNEY VALENTINE - ACTOR

by Eddie Rollinson

On the wall of the south transept of Holy Cross Church is an oak plaque. It has a carved surround of laurel leaves and inset are the words:-

SYDNEY VALENTINE

ACTOR

BORN 1864

DIED 23rd DEC 1919

Although he lived at Pear Tree Cottage on Sarratt Green for at least six years prior to his death, nothing seems to be known locally of his social conscience, his work for his fellow actors, his numerous stage appearances in London and New York and his contribution to the village in which he lived.

Research at the Hertford Record Office revealed some information and this was followed by visits to the Theatre Museum and Colindale Newspaper Libraries. Reference books, Who's Who in the Theatre (1st 3 editions) and a recently published book From Irving to Olivier by Dr. M. Anderson were invaluable in detailing the social history of the acting profession from 1880 - 1983.

The first appearance of Sydney Valentine, aged 20, in London was on 21st March 1884. He was then seldom away from the London stage for the rest of his acting life. He played in companies with Martin Harvey and Sir Henry Irving with whom he acted in America. In 1905 he appeared at Sandringham and Windsor Castle before King Edward VII and in 1911 a command performance at Drury Lane. In the autumn of 1911 he returned to America, playing in Atlantic City and New York.

The date of his residence in Sarratt is not yet known precisely but in 1913 he wrote a letter to the Watford Observer complaining about the state of the roads in Sarratt and the damage caused to horses.

In 1916 news came through that his son, Guy, went missing in Flanders. It is now known that he is buried in a military cemetery in Flers, France.

Sydney fought a long campaign for his fellow actors to improve conditions back-stage in London and the Provinces and he was a principal negotiator in the first contract between the Actors' Association and the Theatre Managements which was known as "The Valentine Contract".

While addressing a meeting of the Association at the Duke of York Theatre on 19th December 1919 he had a stroke from which he never recovered. He died on 23rd December, aged 54 years, and his cremation was at Golders Green on 29th December. On 31st December a memorial service was held at St. Margaret's Westminster, attended by many members of the theatrical profession - Andre Charlot, Sir Squire Bancroft, Mr. & Mrs. Owen Nares, Mr. Charles Hawtry and Miss Constance Collier, as well as representatives of many associations and committees on which he sat including the Director of the French Drama, Science & Fine Arts Society.

It is hoped to produce a book later this year on the work of this fine actor who was held in such high esteem by members of his profession.

