

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - October 2011

### Memories of Cockpole Green and Crazies Hill

The Wargrave Local History Society met at the new meeting room at the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground in October to hear Geoff Brooks, who was born and brought up in Cockpole Green, share some of his Memories of Cockpole Green and Crazies Hill.

Geoff's grandfather had moved to Cockpole Green in the early 1920s, where he became the licensee of the Four Horseshoes public house. He remained the licensee until he died - in 1938 - and Geoff's father then took over until the pub closed in 1953. Grandfather was not only a pub landlord, but also did contract work with horses and carts - Geoff's father also being involved in this. However, as time moved on, motorised transport became more readily available, and so there was less need for the service of horses and carts, and so the family diversified into small scale farming. From that period, Geoff recalled the geese (because they would chase him!) and chickens (of which they would have 500 or so at a time). When the war came, they also got into dairy farming and kept pigs.

The war changed things greatly. Early on, for example, bulldozers arrived to push down many of the trees in order to create the airfield, whilst along Aniper Lane, large tractors removed the hedges. A little later, the top end of the airfield, by Upper Culham Farm, was used to train pilots, so there were lots of Tiger Moths to be seen - and as lads, they would get into the remaining hedge to watch - something the trainees might have preferred them not to do! At the bottom end of the airfield was a large hangar, where Spitfires were assembled - using parts made in an underground engineering factory at Warren Row and bodies and wings brought in by big Bedford articulated lorries (known as Queen Marys). Once assembled, they would be test flown - not always successfully - near to the top of their land at the Four Horseshoes.

The airfield was also the site of what seemed to be experimental work, with a craft somewhat like a helicopter with air intakes on the side, and people with clipboards and bowler hats taking notes! Geoff would get home from school, change and 'be off' to watch the chaps, with the craft tethered to the ground as the engines whined away and the whole thing lifted up - the sound was very like the later jet engines.

During the day, Geoff's father would be out on the land, and his mother would run the pub. On one occasion, a group of soldiers came into the pub, wanting drinks. It transpired that they were on an exercise to take the airfield - but had got there too early! Geoff's younger brother appeared, and he was given a drink - rather too much - by one of the chaps who was then reprimanded by Mrs Brooks! After the exercise, the chap called back to enquire after the lad - to again be clearly told off -- the chap turned out to have been Frank Swift, the England goal-keeper! In the run up to D Day, any piece of common ground would be used for soldiers to camp out, and the lads would go and visit them - get fed, and given rides on Bren gun carriers and so on. There was no tv, no recreation ground etc, so this was accepted as part of the lifestyle they had as children.

Geoff explained that they were all used to guns, as virtually every family had one - used to go out to get rabbits. His mother would often say to him of an evening 'get up early will you, and go and get a rabbit will you'. This would not only be on their land, but on the other side of the road at Hatch Gate Farm - it was the 'way of life' then, said Geoff, 'almost poaching' - and they would 'live off the land'. Scrumping was another favoured pastime. It was a different culture to that seen now, and they learnt to respect the 'country law' - to close gates behind them, for example. There were usually two local policemen who would patrol Cockpole Green, as the parish boundary went down the middle of the road, and they, strictly,

were in Hurley - although PC Vile from Wargrave could watch from the entrance to Hatch Gate Farm as the lads would whizz down the road on their bikes! They usually dealt with the officer from Remenham - PC Robins would regularly call at the pub to check the records for the cows. Geoff had made a bow from a stick - a rick peg, which was a nice piece of hazel - but making an arrow, which had to be light and well balanced was not so easy. PC Robins told him to use a nice straight dead stinging nettle, and fix it into the pith of a bit of elder wood - did they go !! - the arrow went right over the roof !!!!

The boys would also help out on the farm - often taking the cows to one of the other fields for grazing, hauling a heavy ( for a 10 year old) container of water for the cows to drink from. Their Mother - who would have been working in the bar till closing time at 10.30pm, would fetch the cows back again at 5am - ready to be milked in time for the milkman to collect at 8am. He would bring a flat-bed lorry from Slough, and the clanging of the churns would be heard as the lorry came all the way up from Knowl Hill.

Geoff also recalled his time at school - although 'nobody much liked school in those days'. The headmistress, Miss Howlett, was strict - but kind (and maybe such discipline would be beneficial now-a-days). There had been very few bombs fall on the area, but one day near the end of the war a V2 ('flying bomb') blew up in the air, and created a deep hole opposite Goulder's Cottages. In school, they had just had their milk, and on hearing the bang, Miss Howlett told them to all get under their desks. Geoff remembered that he made sure he grabbed his pen as he did so! The school, at that time, had primitive facilities, and just one coke stove in each classroom. Geoff would try - especially in the winter - and ensure his marks in 'weekly tests', which sorted the pupils from 'top' to 'bottom' would secure him a desk alongside the stove!

Geoff recounted, in his gentle way, many other tales of incidents and the way of life growing up in a rural community in the 1930s and 1940s - an evening much enjoyed by a capacity audience!

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The next meeting takes place on Tuesday, November 8th, when Derek Brown from the Consuta Trust, will tell us about the old steam launch, Consuta, built for use by the umpires at Henley Royal Regatta, and the work to restore it, whilst on Tuesday, December 13th we will hold our Christmas Party. Then, on Tuesday, January 10th, John Harrison and Rob Needham will recount the history of Wargrave Bells and Bell Ringing.