

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - December 2022

Christmas Party - From the Archives

Wargrave Local History Society's December meeting was the Christmas Party, when members enjoyed delicious festive fare prepared by Wendy Smith.

During the evening, the society's secretary showed some items "From the Archives", with photographs recently added to the collection. On this occasion, they covered a slightly wider area than the village itself, with images from over the last century or so. The earliest was from 1915, when Empire Day was celebrated in Crazies Hill on May 25th and young people received a certificate for "helping to send some comfort and happiness to the brave sailors and soldiers of the British Empire, fighting to uphold Liberty, Justice, Honour and Freedom in the Great War." The original postcard had been printed 'back to front', but was able to be turned round the right way to be shown!



Similar celebrations took place at the Robert Piggott Junior School when they marked mid-summer with the crowning of a 'May Queen' and her attendants, country dancing and dancing around a Maypole, with a picture dating from 14th June 1983. Although it looks a modern photograph, the pupils taking part would be approaching 50 now!





The following year, the school's "middle team" made an educational visit to Henley on 21st June. That included a climb to the top of the church tower, where a view looking along Hart Street towards Henley Town Hall was captured. At that time, the traffic was allowed to flow in both directions in the Market Place, although the central area that had been used for parking has been paved over and lined with trees on both sides.

The rivers have had an impact on village life for centuries, and from the early 20th century 1930s houseboats were moored along the banks of the Loddon, to be followed by development on the adjacent plots. At the time few mains services were available there, so these homes were really only suitable to be used as summer houses - a charming thatched cottage built up on piers to be clear of the flood waters that can affect the area., as could be seen in a 1990 picture where the land on both sides of the river could be under water from the St George and Dragon to the Henley Sailing Club.



Changes in the wider area included views in Reading, which had several department stores in time past, and where trolleybuses existed until 1968, and tram tracks were still in place over 30 years after they last ran, whilst the building of the local motorways featured in 1970s images, and other views showed how parts of the town centre have changed in the last 50 years.

From the pre-motorway era, vehicles within the village included W H Oliver's bakery delivery van and the local fire engine, with its crew, both pictures being from the early 1930s.





Although the provision of a military hospital to treat wounded soldiers in WW1 in Wargrave is well documented, less well known is a similar provision in WW2, when the large house, then known as Parkwood, at Crazies Hill was taken over for convalescent patients. It was run by the Red Cross - as shown by the emblem on the bibs of the nurses' uniforms in a picture taken in 1945

Examples of aerial photographs from the early 1960s and late 1970s revealed changes in the landscape and village development. Down at ground level, the most recent picture shown was one taken at the bottom of Victoria Road in 2021, but even that is now a historic image. A large Edwardian house called Fairfield was demolished earlier this year, but fortunately history society members have been able to photograph it before that happened - recording the present for the benefit of future historians.

