

# Wargrave Local History Society

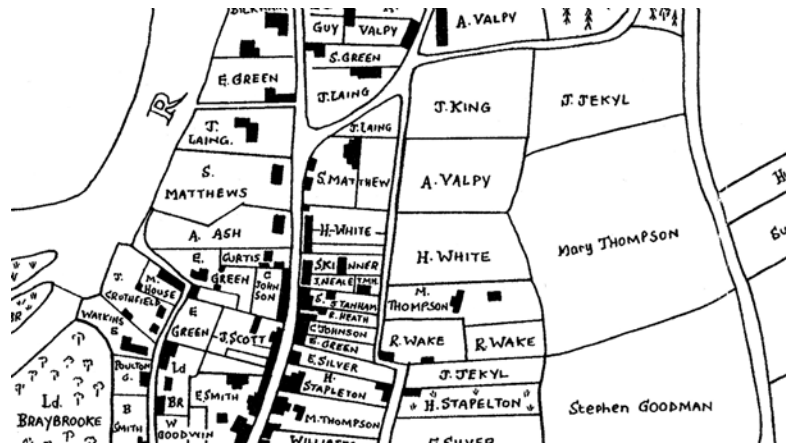
Latest News - September 2021

## The Hidden History of Wargrave Hall - Terry Grouk

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In September, the Wargrave Local History Society resumed its programme of meetings with *The Hidden History of Wargrave Hall*, when Terry Grouk revealed the results of his research into the house in a presentation made using Zoom.

The façade of Wargrave Hall that faces Wargrave High Street is familiar to many people, and *The Book of Wargrave* tells of some of the 'political' events associated with it, but as a resident of Wargrave Hall, Terry was able to give the story 'from the inside'. He had set out to discover not only the history of the house, but also of the people who lived there.



Wargrave Hall is situated opposite Wargrave Hill, next to the house Barrymore, close to Silvaplane and Holly Cottage, (both of which having been part of the Wargrave Hall estate in time past) and has lawns down to the water's edge, offering magnificent views of the River Thames.

The house was built about 1770, for John Matthews of Binfield. Little is known about him, except that he had 3 children – daughters Sarah and Mary and a son, Richard. The girls both married professional men – Sarah in 1771 to Joseph Hill, a wealthy solicitor who bought Wargrave Hill House (now known as Wargrave Manor), whilst Mary's wedding to the Rev.d John Tickell took place in 1773. This was the same year as Rev.d Tickell became the tutor to Lord Barrymore, before the latter went to Eton. When Barrymore returned to Wargrave in 1787, he lived at the house next door to the Matthews family, renaming it Barrymore House. Richard Barrymore was a notorious character, a bare-chested pugilist known as 'Hellgate', keen on betting, but also established a theatre in the village that was patronised by high society. As a spendthrift, however, he was in serious debt when he died prematurely at the age of 23.

John Matthews died in 1778, leaving Wargrave Hall to his son. Born in 1743, Richard had married Anne Staverton in 1773, and they went on to have 6 children. The oldest, Mary Ann, married Thomas William Cooke who owned a large estate at Polstead in Suffolk. The next, John Staverton Matthews was ordained, and married Mary Webster in 1815. Richard junior married Catherine Buckley, and they had 4 sons. Sadly, Richard committed suicide in 1815 by throwing himself into the river near the ferry crossing. Thomas Matthews, born in 1778, became apprenticed as a clerk to a haberdasher Thomas George Knapp of Haberdasher's Hall, London on 26 February 1796 when he was 18 years old, and never married. Next came Sarah Elizabeth, born in 1783, who eventually inherited Wargrave Hall. Sarah did not marry, but is recorded as a witness at the wedding of Sarah Ximenes in 1815 – the Ximenes being a wealthy family who lived at

Bear Place. Peter, the youngest child of Richard and Anne, was born in 1785. He often visited his sister at Polstead, where he met Maria Marten, who lived on the Polstead estate. Peter father a child by her in 1824, but did not marry her. Maria then had a relationship with William Corden, but she died soon afterwards. Maria's sister had a premonition, and the body was found under a barn – a scandal of the day which was dramatized in the play “Murder in the Red Barn” - William Corden being executed for the murder.

Richard Matthews continued to prosper, acquiring several other properties across Berkshire. In 1804, he was appointed as Sheriff of Berkshire. However, she continued to live at Binfield, and rented Wargrave Hall to the Rev.d Albert Mangles. His family owned the large Wanborough estate, near Guildford, and he was the vicar of Horsell (near Woking), where a vicarage was provided – but he preferred to live in Wargrave. He became involved locally, and is recorded as a subscriber to the foundation of the church at Knowl Hill.

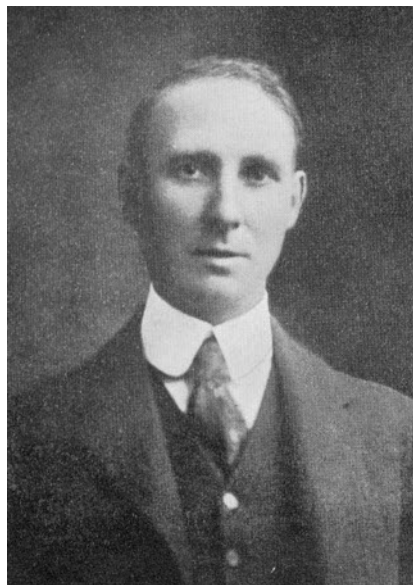
Sarah died in 1840, and Wargrave Hall then passed to her sister Mary Anne, on condition that due to the latter's precarious health, it should be sold when Mary Anne died (in 1849) and the proceeds shared equally between a niece and 5 nephews.

The purchaser was Ebenezer Fuller Maitland - his surname at birth was Maitland, but he adopted the name Fuller as a condition of him inheriting a fortune from his wife's aunt. Ebenezer's father (also Ebenezer) was a director of the Bank of England. They were a wealthy family, owning several country estates, including Shinfield Park, whilst his cousin, Henry Sperling, owned the extensive Park Place estate. In 1824, Henry and Ebenezer exchanged properties, so that the Fuller-Maitlands came to Park Place. They had 12 children, including Thomas who was born in 1817. He became a barrister and magistrate, and in 1842 married Anna Valpy, daughter of Captain Anthony Blagrave Valpy, who rented Wargrave Manor – one of the witnesses being the Wargrave benefactress Harriett Cooke Hitchings (later Smith). In 1849, Thomas and Anna bought Wargrave Hall. They had 10 children – the first 3 in London and the rest in Wargrave. The 8th child, Richard Anthony, became a well-known musician, nick-named ‘dancing Dick’, and he married Adelaide Cubitt, of the famous building firm (with other connections to Wargrave in the Hannen family).



*Thomas Fuller Maitland*

The earliest known photograph of Wargrave Hall dates from about 1870, during the time when it belonged to the Fuller-Maitlands. The family, however, did not always occupy it, but rented it out to several tenants. Amongst those were Mrs Bradish Ellames of Marlow, who wanted to be nearer her brother Sydney Platt, who rented Wargrave Manor at the time; Sir Reginald Hanson, founder of Commercial Union Assurance (now Aviva); Frank Walters Bond, who later owned Wargrave Court, and Francis Deakin, a Midlands industrialist, who, the Henley Advertiser reported in 1898, inherited the estate of his brother which was worth about £5 million in today's values.



*Edward Goulding*

By this time, the Ordnance Survey map showed that the Wargrave Hall estate had expanded, to include the property that had belonged to Anne Ash, and the land as far as Ferry Lane, whilst there was also an orchard and stables on the east side of the High Street opposite Wargrave Hall. The house had also had extensions built during this period.

In 1906 the Fuller Maitland family sold Wargrave Hall to Edward Goulding. He was a lawyer and a Conservative Member of Parliament – initially for Devizes, but later Worcester. He had previously rented The Croft, in the Bothy. He bought Wargrave Hall so that it could be used as a place out of London where spirited political debate could take place. Visitors included Winston Churchill and the Prime Minister.

At this time, the Liberal Government had proposed Home Rule for Ireland, but kept delaying the process. The Unionists and Republicans were preparing for a fight. At the same time, Germany was mobilising its forces, and it would have suited them for the British Army to be in Ireland. They therefore started supplying guns in 1914 to the Irish Republican Army.

At the end of July 1914, Edward Goulding was able to arrange a meeting at Wargrave Hall between leading members of the Liberal Government and the Conservatives. The latter agreed to support the Government in the event of a war, and were even prepared to consider a coalition if needs be, and the Prime Minister, H H Asquith, was advised of the decision. Edward Goulding then arranged for Edward Carson (leader of the Ulster Unionists) to a meeting, as a result of which the Unionists agreed that their first call of duty would be to support the British Government in the event of a war with Germany, and so they would not fight the Republicans. John Redmond, a leading member of the latter, then gave a similar assurance to Andrew Bonar Law (later to be Prime Minister himself), a few days later. The Government was thus reassured that the British Army forces in Ireland would be able to take part in the conflict in Europe, and within a few days of the Wargrave Hall meetings, Britain declared war on Germany.



*Wargrave Hall in 1916*

The Irish situation did not get resolved, however, which led to the Easter Uprising in 1916. After the war, a meeting at Wargrave Hall was arranged on 22nd October 1921, attended by Lord Beaverbrook, who had previously that day met with Tim Healy, a prominent Irish republican. Also present were Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, F E Smith (Lord Chancellor), Andrew Bonar Law and Edward Goulding. Although Winston Churchill and the Lord Chancellor were not initially in favour of Home Rule for Ireland, by the end of the meeting they had reluctantly agreed to help Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, to negotiate the creation of the Irish Free State with Tim Healy to be elected 1st Governor-General. The six counties of Ulster would remain as Northern Ireland, and the treaty was signed just over 6 weeks after the Wargrave Hall meeting.

Andrew Bonar Law became Prime Minister in 1922, and Edward Goulding was offered a post in the Cabinet, but declined as he wanted to concentrate on his business interests. He was, however, granted a peerage as Lord Wargrave the same year.

In 1925, Edward Goulding bought Shiplake Court, and the following year he sold Wargrave Hall to Mrs Felton-Peel. She was the widow of William Felton Peel, who was descended from another British Prime Minister, Robert Peel. After Mrs Felton-Peel died, in 1930, the property remained empty until sold in 1933 to Major Francis Edward Fryer. The Ordnance Survey map for 1932 shows the grounds to have extended behind Holly Cottage and Manor Cottages.



*Wargrave Hall in the 1920s*

Major Fryer had come to Wargrave from Newbury, in order to be near to his brother, Charles, who lived in Dark Lane. He brought with him Reginald Annetts, his manservant. Both men were very keen on Morris Dancing, and both the ballroom at Wargrave Hall and the lawns were put to use for The Wargrave Morris Men and other visiting troupes. A 14 seater Bedford coach was kept in a barn on the Ferry Lane side of the site, which the chauffeur, Bill Kent, who lived at Holly Cottage would drive to take the Wargrave team to events, the coach being available for village groups at other times.

Major Fryer had to move out during World War 2, as Wargrave Hall was used to billet US Air Force officers stationed at Stanlake, Twyford, at that time. Post-war, the Annetts family moved to live in the northern part of Wargrave Hall. Major Fryer, however, did not need quite so much space for himself, and so kept the ground floor for himself, and had the 2 upper floors converted into separate apartments.

When Major Fryer died, in 1961, the property passed to his brother. It was decided that it would be sold, Reginald Annetts being asked to remain for a year to help in the preparations – which included dealing with a large quantity of firearms and ammunition found in a safe. The sale took place in 1962, the purchaser being a Mrs Coveney. Some of the land was sold off, including that for Silvaplane, which had a covenant restricting it to be a low building, whilst Holly Cottage, Deep River Cottage and Ferry Cottage were also sold off. Mrs Coveney arranged for Wargrave Hall itself to be further adapted to create a total of 5 apartments. The estate is managed by Wargrave Hall Limited, which was set up by the residents in June 1964.

Over the last 250 years, Terry said, there had been a myriad of personalities associated with Wargrave Hall, but, as the Annetts family observed, “This was indeed a very happy house”.

Terry plans to make the results of his research available as a booklet, containing more details and images than can be included here, hopefully later this year.

