

# Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - June 2000

## Living History in Crazies Hill

The Wargrave Local History Society welcomed Selina Avent as its June speaker, as a short notice replacement for the planned speaker, who had been taken into hospital. Selina spoke enthusiastically about Crazies Hill, and in particular about two of the houses there.

She began with a brief review of the community's history. In 1685 there were only 6 houses there, which had grown to 15 by the 1818 Enclosure Act, and even in 1965 it was described as one of the most isolated villages for miles around, although by then it was becoming a place where people tended to live, rather than live and work. At that time it still had 3 public houses, - one recently closed, The Hatchgate (a 'spit and sawdust pub') and The Horns (a 'posher' hostelry), now in 2000 the only one remaining. In earlier times there had been even more, such as Fox Steep, a wooden clad building, and the Hurdlemakers Arms, so called as the hurdlemaker lived there. Some families had been long associated with Crazies Hill, such as the Silvers, who for over 300 years had a smithy there. One was also a local constable, and if he had arrested someone too late in the day to get them to a jail, they would be chained to his forge. Amongst other interesting buildings, Crazies Hill is the site of the former Henley Town Hall, built in 1790 and moved to Crazies Hill in 1900; Rebecca's Well, over what had been the only source of clean water in Crazies Hill, even as late as 50 years ago; and the Eleanor Wemyss Home, for convalescent children. The village has no shop, and its post office - one of the most inaccessible in Berkshire - closed in recent times.

The first of the houses that Selina spoke of in some detail was Rosedale. This, it is thought, was built in the 1780s on the foundations of a Tudor building. It is built of local hand made bricks from Knowl Hill. Until a few years ago, the rent of 6d per week was still collected 'occasionally' from tenants of the 3 cottages. The local authority wanted to demolish the building in 1969, but eventually the order was rescinded and the 3 cottages converted into the single house that it is now. During the work, a cobbled path was discovered under the garden, and various interesting other items were found, such as Tudor bottles, china dolls heads and gamekeeper's tunic buttons, which members were able to see.

Part of the site had been sold in 1975 to a Mr Millard, who had a house built there - appropriately called Clay Court. The land behind the house had been a clay pit, and later was used by Brakspears to dump all their old bottles. This practice had even taken place on Sundays, but came to a close in 1972 following an incident when the old crates were being burnt.

The second house had begun as Brickfield Cottages, although it was now named Kiln House. Some of the industrial outbuildings still survive, although the kiln - noted as newly erected in 1862 - had disappeared by 1926. From maps, the house can be dated to between 1891 and 1911. Some of the bricks used in the house had been handmade on site and have the brickmakers mark of 2 boot-hooks on them. The building is unusual, for its era, in having both a damp course and

double skinned walls. As originally built, it had 3 rooms upstairs and 3 downstairs, plus an outside toilet 'with a wonderful mahogany seat'.

Selina also told us of a field where nature had now returned a collection of cowslips, and of a former lady resident of Crazies Hill who sold cars for Morris Motors - she wore a large skirt, and kept a gun hidden between the folds!

The talk was an excellent example of how, by diligent questioning of residents, the history of the last hundred years or so can be dug out and recorded for posterity. We wish Selina every success in her continuing investigations, now that she has been bitten by the bug!

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