

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - January 2018

### Around the Wargrave Recreation Ground

In January, Mick Pope, who has been involved with many of the village sporting teams, gave an interesting illustrated presentation to the Wargrave Local History Society on activities *Around the Recreation Ground*, which covered much more than the football, cricket, bowls and tennis!

He began with a comment from the Parish Magazine for June 1888, when the Vicar said that "If any gentleman or lady in Wargrave would provide the boys with a field for cricket he would be a public benefactor and earn for himself the lasting gratitude of the children and their parents". His wish came true, in 1907, when Harriette Cooke Smith gave over eleven acres to the village for a recreation ground, and also provided the Pavilion and groundsman's house. As with her other benefactions, she took a personal interest in its creation, and also gave an endowment, for the upkeep of the ground.

The first groundsman was a Mr Smith (not related to Harriette), who only stayed for a year, when Joe Langford took over. He continued to look after the ground until he retired, in 1948, when his eldest son, Albert, took over. Ill health forced Albert to give up the job, and he retired to Guernsey in 1951. Joe's youngest son, village postman Arthur Langford, applied to the Recreation Ground trustees – Derek and Nigel Hannen and Dr Black – to take over the work, and he was accepted, at a wage of £4/15/- per week. His duties included cleaning the Pavilion, mowing the playing areas, etc. At that time, the mower was pulled by a pony, which had a stable close to the groundsman's house, although a Dennis motor mower with a ride-on attachment was purchased soon after. The grass cuttings were piled beside the recreation ground, from where they could be used by the allotment holders. In later time, the Dennis was replaced by a gang mower pulled by a small Fordson tractor - Mick Pope doing the mowing during Arthur's annual holidays. Arthur continued until he retired in 1980, when he was replaced by Tony Searby, Mick again deputising during 1981 when Tony had a spell in hospital. In 1984, Tony was succeeded by Peter Fox – assistant groundsman at Jesus College Cambridge, his wife taking on the caretaking duties at the Pavilion, but they were in turn replaced by Peter Alford and his wife, in 1985, when Peter Fox took up a post at one of the Oxford colleges. Peter Alford remained until December 1990, when the present groundsman, Martin Wood took on the tasks of maintaining the various sports pitches etc.

Mick went on to describe the way the Pavilion (since converted to provide a parish Council office and meeting rooms, following the opening of a new Pavilion in July 2011) was used then. There were changing and shower facilities for the men's teams, changing rooms for ladies' teams, and an area where after match refreshments could be served, (later including a bar). Close by was a machine and equipment shed to house the mower, roller, scarifier, etc.

Mick then recounted the history of various other buildings on the Recreation Ground. The Bowls Club opened in 1926, originally for men only, renting the area from the Trustees for £30 per annum. A club house was erected at a cost of £93/13/. Joe Langford being paid according to the hours he spent tending the Green. The club house was later extended, and a ladies section of the club was begun in the early 1960s. By 1980, however, the building was showing signs of wear, and a decision made to replace it in 1986. Fund-raising was organised by then Chairman, Terry Gurton, and the concrete base laid in April 1987. The internal fittings were provided by club members, and the new clubhouse opened on August 2nd 1987, being extended by 12ft at the rear 10 years later. As well as the village club, the Green is now also used for county matches. The local Scout group had been formed in 1909, with headquarters in a shed in the then Scoutmaster's garden, but was replaced by a wooden building in 1929 on the Recreation Ground (on the site where the Pre-School is now). However, it was burnt down in 1963.

The Trustees then agreed to the provision of a brick building in 1964. This was later extended, most recently in 1993, when the work was financed by a “buy a brick” scheme, and a gas fired central heating system installed. The local Guides’ had a hut in the grounds of the old infant school, but the land was sold to make way for the village surgery, and the present Guide Hut built in 1970 on the Recreation Ground, being officially opened in July 1971. Toilets were added in 1973, and also a concrete path (enabling 2 disabled Guides to access the building).



The Youth Club had started meeting in the Woodclyffe Hall, but in 1977 it was decided that it would be better if they had their own premises, and so a concrete slab building was erected close to the Bowling Green at a cost of £9000, funded (like several other projects) by loans and generous donations. Its ownership later passed to a management committee, who hired it to the Youth Club, and also to the Pre-School. A fire in June 2003 led to the destruction of the building and pre-school equipment, but it re-opened after rebuilding in July 2004.

The Tennis Club had started with 2 shale courts and 2 grass courts. Arthur Langford mowed the grass courts – but villagers were not allowed to play on them until after Wimbledon fortnight, as they were hired to the Czech team, including Jan Kodes, to practice on! The shale courts were replaced by all-weather courts in 1966, and further courts, and floodlighting have been added since then.

Cricket was first played in Wargrave over 200 years ago, a match against Twyford being recorded in 1791. From 1907, matches were played on the Recreation Ground, the club flourishing in the 1920s and 30s, with an annual 'Cricket Week' taking place annually until the outbreak of WW2. The teams made use of the Pavilion, for changing room facilities and for after match refreshments – a bar being allowed in the Pavilion in the post-war period. Sunday cricket was also introduced, in the early 1960s. The Cricket Club later took on the administration of the Recreation Ground, by having a lease from the Parish Council. Plans were drawn up to enlarge the facilities available for sports teams (not just cricket), and planning permission sought for a new Pavilion in 2008. Funds for the work were sought from the National Lottery and Sport England, as well as by local appeals and donations, and the new building was formally opened in July 2011. Wargrave Cricket Club has become strong and successful, whilst its facilities are also used for the County team to play matches in the Minor Counties League.

Football is recorded as having been played from 1886, the Wargrave Football Club becoming affiliated to the Berks and Bucks Football Association in 1896. They too moved to play matches on the Recreation Ground from 1907, moving to be in the Reading and District League from 1927. The Club was reformed after WW2, having two pitches – one of maximum size, and one a little smaller. They also used the facilities in the Pavilion.

A Hockey Club was also formed in the village, playing matches on a Sunday afternoon. Although disbanded in the late 1960s, it was rekindled in 1971, when the Phoenix Hockey Club (associated with Huntley and Palmers) lost their ground, and merged with the Wargrave hockey players. Hockey continued to be played on the Recreation Ground until the late 1970s.

Other uses for the Recreation Ground have included village fetes, firework displays, celebrations for VE Day and the Coronation, etc. and a cycle speedway, and it is used as the 'base' for the Wargrave Runners annual 10k event. The opportunity to extend the ground was taken in 1995, when a further 14 acres of land was purchased by the Parish Council, to form the area known as Kings Field. This includes a dedicated dog-walking area, a BMX track for young people to use, and a village fruit orchard (in memory of long time village resident Buddy Rose). On the original part of the Recreation Ground there is also a children's play area. Perhaps less well-known is that the groundsman created a special long jump pit, where the Olympian Mary Rand trained, whilst the international athlete Bruce Tulloh also trained there.



Mick had also arranged a large display of photographs and newspaper cuttings relating to people and events at the Recreation Ground over the last century or so, which members enjoyed browsing after the formal part of the evening.

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The next meeting will be on Tuesday, February 13th, when Catherine Sampson will give us a glimpse of some of the many historical, unusual and sometimes hidden *Berkshire Churches* and churchyards, and the people associated with them, whilst on Tuesday, March 13th the Society will hold its AGM, when details of the programme for the coming year will be revealed. The meetings take place at the Old Pavilion on the Recreation Ground, Wargrave, starting at 8pm.

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