

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - July 2011

### Society Outing - Stonor House

Stonor House was the location for the visit to a place of local interest for members of the Wargrave Local History Society this summer.

The house nestles in a beautiful setting in the valley to the north of Henley - and built so that the hill on the north side shelters it from the winter winds, but the main aspect is able to trap the summer sun. The approach to the house is up the drive through the deer park - the deer were wisely sheltering under the trees from the summer sun!

The Stonor family, who have had their home here for over 850 years, are Roman Catholics - and so from the time of the Reformation until the early 1800s found themselves under threat of persecution. Some of their lands were confiscated, they were no longer able to hold office in government, and had many other restrictions on their travel etc. They were regularly fined for not attending the Church of England, whilst to be found housing a Catholic priest (as the Stonors did) was a serious crime. Despite all these pressures, and the risks involved, the family remained Catholic, and continued to use the late 13th century chapel which adjoins the house, which was the starting point for our visit. The law regarding Catholicism was relaxed in the late 18th century, and it became possible for the chapel to be repaired and remodelled - it is this 1790s Gothic Revival style which survives now.



The house itself also has origins in the 13th century. Gradually various additions were made, but by the early 16th century it had become a collection of medieval buildings that had grown piecemeal. The then owner, Sir Francis Stonor, arranged to make the structure a coherent whole, by adding parts to the straggling layout and re-facing parts in brick, to give a much more balanced appearance.

Entering the house by the main door, we came to the Gothic Revival Hall. This was originally part of a 14th

century Hall, but was divided to create what is now the Drawing Room, and decorated in the 'Strawberry Hill style, popularised by Walpole, in 1759. The Drawing Room itself includes one of several interesting paintings in the house that show the development of the building. There are - again, throughout the house, many portraits of members of the family, whilst the furniture includes some 18th century gold painted chairs and several items by the firm of Gillow. Moving on to what is now the Dining Room, (although it had had various other uses over time), the most striking feature is a panoramic view of Paris, showing the major buildings as seen from the River Seine (with a mountainous background being artistic licence!). It had been printed on paper, and mounted on cardboard, in 1814, and extends around about

half the walls of the room. Apart from the windows, the lighting in this room is by wall mounted sconces and table candles - there is no lighting from the ceiling. Beyond this is the Study. This is thought had been used as a chapel in the 1600s - possibly when to use the larger Chapel outside was considered too dangerous. The floor is on two levels - the higher one likely having been the dais for the altar at that time. A large and highly detailed map dated 1726 shows the extent of the Stonor family estate across south Oxfordshire at that time.

On ascending the servant's staircase, the first of the bedrooms includes a most unusual large bed, in the style of a shell. Also here is a chair from a gondola and some oyster shaped chairs, which together give rise to this being known as the Shell Room (or as Francis Stonor's Bedroom, after the member of the family who collected the items displayed there). Adjacent to this room is the Library - which runs from the first floor at the front to ground level at the back of the house - a result of it being built into the hillside. In its present form, it dates from the 16th century, and contains one of the most important collections of Recusant books - items either printed or imported illegally for the use of Catholics in the post Reformation period of anti-Catholic prejudice. Beyond here is what is known as Lady Camoys's Bedroom, furnished with a 17th century 4-poster bed, a Chippendale style chest of drawers, and an 18th century desk made by Gillows. Ascending the staircase into the attic is a room where St Edmund Campion hid his printing press to produce Catholic tracts in the late 16th century, which now houses an exhibition about his life and work. Returning to the first floor, the Long Gallery houses fascinating displays of items relating to both the house and the family.

As always for a WLHS visit, we ended with delicious tea and cakes, served in the tea room housed in part of the Aisled Hall !



The beautiful gardens were also available for a visit after the afternoon rain had passed through.

The house and gardens (although without the benefit of the expert guides the Society had) is open on Sunday afternoons until September 18th, and on Wednesday afternoons in July and August. For more information, visit their website [www.stonor.com/discover/the-house/](http://www.stonor.com/discover/the-house/)

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The next formal meeting takes place on Tuesday, September 13th, when Peter Smith will tell us about The Royal State Coaches - using his detailed scale models to illustrate his talk. This meeting is expected to be at the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground - check our website for confirmation, or contact as below. Then on Tuesday, October 11th, Geoff Brooks - who was born and brought up in Cockpole Green, will share some of his Memories of Cockpole Green and Crazies Hill.