

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - October 2001

### Down Memory Lane

The October meeting of the Wargrave Local History Society took the form of a *Down Memory Lane*, when those who have lived in the area for a long time share their memories. This time these were centred on Crazies Hill - with over 60 people sharing and listening to these reminiscences.

The first topic was farming, which had been a major activity, but although still happy to farm, it is no longer profitable. In the 1940s each farm would employ say 7 men, growing corn, root vegetables and had some cattle with calves, and bred a horse or two. Mr Sparks ran the smithy, and knew the importance of mastering a horse the first time it was shod. A higher charge applied to a 'first time', as it was more difficult, the older horses knowing the routine would lift the foot ready, as it knew the movements. When it came to threshing time, a lot of people would come to help - borrowing labour from another farm, and the children having the day off school, whilst a traction engine would be brought from Headington's Farm at Wargrave.

Another use for traction engines was for haulage. When the Eleanor Wemyss home was being built, a Sentinel was in use to bring bricks to Crazies Hill, when it tipped into a pit beside of the road!

The local links with aviation formed another topic - including Peter Twiss, the test pilot for Fairey's who lived at Fox Steep, whilst before the war Alan Cobham's flying circus could be sampled at Cockpole Green. During the war itself, Spitfires had been assembled there, and local people were asked to work putting the wings together - one even taking a young baby to work with them. Mrs Mitchell (wife of the plane's designer) would come weekly from Reading with coupons for the workers. In nearby Warren Row there was also an underground factory making parts for aircraft. Other wartime memories included the day in March 1945 when part of a V2 flying bomb landed close to houses at Cockpole Green at 10 am. At the school all the pupils sheltered under desks as the building shook. There was no milk for the pupils that day, as the building movement cause black dust to fall in the beakers. Some in houses nearby were treated by RAF personnel, whilst at the stables of the Four Horseshoes all the slates came off, and several houses close by were condemned. October 10th 1940 saw a 'dog-fight' over Crazies Hill, when 3 groups of German bombers heading for Oxford were turned back by RAF fighters.

The school at Crazies Hill brought back memories from others, some of whom had attended the old school from the age of 5 - 14. A contemporary report of its opening, on 16th July 1861 described it as a pretty building, provided by the efforts of the local people. After the service taken by the Vicar, 3 tents were used - one for the men, who had 'bread, cheese and most excellent beer' - eating 56lb of cheese; one for the women, who drank quantities of tea, and one for the children, and then children of the Piggott School gathered round Mr Bennett (the head teacher there) to sing.

The large houses at Park Place and Cayton Park - previously called Park Wood - prompted further recollections. Cayton Park had originally been one storey higher, but the top layer had been removed - a later Arab owner had the building enlarged in plan. Some local people would be employed to caddie at the golf course there - on condition that they would 'swear hand on heart' that they would not listen to the conversations of the golfers.

Many other topics were recalled during the evening - village shops - the supply of electricity to Crazies Hill, famous people who once lived there, a rumoured local ghost, or even the man who charged 1d per bucket to collect water.

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Since the report of the 'Down Memory Lane' meeting was written, the following comments have been received.

From Roger Stanley in OZ.

I watched a V1 doodlebug come over Knowl Hill and jumped into a ditch when the engine stopped. I understand that it crashed in Crazies Hill or Cockpole Green. Your notes mention that PART of a V2 rocket crashed as above. V2 rockets did not disintegrate and land in separate pieces as far as I'm able to ascertain. They arrived silently and complete with their warhead and had tremendous devastating effects wherever they landed. Perhaps some others will confirm this. There was of course the 'large' 500lb which dropped in the paddock just North of Warner's Brick Kiln adjacent to Star Lane. This did NOT explode and was reputed to have a message from Adolf, saying next time! We children stared into the crater with wild imaginings. In retrospect, I wonder if the Nazis knew of the underground factory in Warren Row, which was close by to where this bomb dropped. There was also an airplane that crashed in the garden of the 3 adjoining cottages in Bottle Lane. It was a single-engined trainer? from White Waltham, the pilot survived with broken legs. Well that's what us children were told at the time. Must have been early in the war as we presumed it had been shot down!! We could see the tail of the plane above the roofs from Bottle Lane. I had been evacuated to the end house with the Page family at the start of the war, but was living in Canhurst Lane by then.

From Bob Silver

A couple of small corrections to your October report on Crazies Hill. My mother tells me that Alan Cobham's Flying Circus was on the area we used to call the airfield opposite the White cottages at Upper Culham. Peter Twiss lived at the Hurdlemakers, not Fox Steep. I remember very well in my early teens walking up and down the road for ages with my cousin until we plucked up enough courage to go in and ask for his autograph.

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