

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - February 2010

### A Stroll Through My Life

A stroll through my life in and around Wargrave and Wargrave Parish Council was the title for the presentation by Dick Bush, the current Chairman of Wargrave Parish Council, to the Wargrave Local History Society's February meeting. Dick began by 'establishing his credentials as a local person'. He had lived all his life in the village. His love of Wargrave, his family, his life in general and on the farm, and his involvement with Wargrave Parish Council were all intertwined parts of his history.

Illustrated by some photographs that had been recently discovered courtesy of his Aunt (also a village resident for many years), Dick was able to show us something of family farming life before he was born. His father - Rodney Bush - and grandfather - Ernest Samuel Bush - had farmed Highfield Farm, as tenants of Sir Ernest Cain, since 1937. From the early 1940s, sheaves of wheat were placed into stooks to dry naturally, before being put in a barn or a thatched rick for protection before being threshed later in the year. The threshing machine would be driven from a large belt from the tractor - a task needing a lot of labour, and hard work. Dick's mother's father, J W Salter Chalker, was also a farmer, who bred the Hintonhurst herd of Fresian cattle. He was awarded the OBE for his work in establishing the tuberculin testing of cattle, and pasteurising milk - a process which led to the virtual eradication of the disease tuberculosis in this country.

His paternal grandfather, Ernest, died the year Dick was born. It was possible that the family was related to the royal family - from George III (known as 'Mad King George' - or - appropriately 'Farmer George'). Ernest's great great grandfather - James Bush - had married the grand-daughter of Hannah Lightfoot - reputedly the bride of King George - if the marriage (allegedly annulled before George's coronation) ever existed!!

Dick's parents - Rita Chalker and Rodney Bush, were married in 1945, and lived at Ivy Dene in Victoria Road, where Dick spent the first 3 years of his life - even at 18 months in wellies. In due course the family moved into Highfield Farm house - a house Dick remembers as being icy cold in the winter. He attended the Piggott Infant School - then in Victoria Road. They would race little black and white snails on stalks of grass at the end of the playground there. He remembered Miss Downes the head - who he recalled taught the upper class, and was very strict. Later he attended Court House School in Maidenhead, and on passing the 11+ went to Maidenhead Grammar School - using the 7.56 am Henley to London train each day. At that time, Wargrave station still had 2 lines of track, a footbridge - and steam trains - Dick still has a 'love of steam' he told us ! He recalled the occasion when there were 'Lobsters on the Line'. Tony Shaw, the village fishmonger had his fish supplies delivered by rail, and one day a crate fell onto the platform and broke - the lobsters then trying to head for Henley. He has no idea how Charlie Stone the porter dealt with it! At the Grammar School, he particularly enjoyed the sports lessons, and learnt to play rugby cricket and hockey. He left without going into the 6th form, as 'the farm was calling' and studied at the Berkshire Institute of Agriculture (in those days run like an extension of National Service) at Burchetts Green. Students even needed a pass to leave the premises or have 'weekend leave'.

After his time at college, he joined the Maidenhead Young Farmers Club - eventually becoming Chairman. He also met his wife, Diane, at YFC - they were married in 1971, and moved into the bungalow at Gibstroude, which they built for around £7000. Their 3 children - Joanna, Matthew and Charlotte - all attended Crazies Hill and The Piggott schools, before going to university.

In 1953, his father was able to buy the farm just prior to the auction of the estate following the death of Sir Ernest Cain - his parents putting all they had into it in buying about 300 acres of land and farm buildings at Highfield, Kings and Gibstroude farms. By the end of the 1950s, they had a bagger combine, and gradually the farm went over to bulk handling and on floor drying of the crops. It was a mixed farm - arable, potatoes etc and a dairy herd of Shorthorn and Ayrshire cows., and later Fresians. Mechanisation increased on the farm - including a self propelled combine harvester that was only sold 3 or 4 years ago (although that was 20 years old when bought). Gradually the many staff who had worked on the farm left - not to be replaced - and the dairy herd was sold. It became necessary to diversify.

As the 1980s came to a close, it became evident that as profit levels fell, changes would be needed. The dairy herd was sold, and a plan to diversify adopted. Obtaining planning permission was difficult, but eventually the 'Spring Meadows Business Centre' was formed, and facilities for horse livery and storage also helped the farm diversify. Cattle graze the grassland in summer, but the arable field work is now done by contractors, and Dick no longer has any regular full time staff.

With such experience of the village, school governors, etc in 1990, Dick was invited to stand for election for the North (Crazies Hill) Ward of the Parish Council. There were 4 candidates for the 2 seats, and he was duly elected. He was soon given a task to undertake, to protect the War Memorial area - having said to the then Chairman, Bob Gray that 'there must be a better way', getting the reply that 'thank you for volunteering - would you come back with some details - not quite what he had anticipated ! Over recent years, the Parish Council has taken on even more responsibilities, and Dick outlined some of these. It has a responsibility for areas such as Camps Pool, the cemetery and chalk pit, the Woodclyffe Hall, allotments and recreation ground, Kings field, Mumberry field, the village design statement, fights for improvements to local roads, deals with planning issues and facilitates the police surgeries, and has plans for a new sports facility and to enable more community use of the existing Pavilion on the recreation Ground.

Dick closed by reminding us that the Parish Council has existed for over 100 years, has 12 members, who are elected every 12 years, and that virtually any village resident may stand. Marion Pope (36 years) and Angela Hodgson (24 years) are the longest serving members. Councillors are unpaid , and take on the task because they love the village and wish to make a contribution to the community. There is a part of each council meeting where the public are able to speak - notably on planning matters, and an Annual Parish Assembly, open to all villagers (this year on Tuesday, 27th April in the Woodclyffe Hall).

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The next meeting is on Tuesday April 13th, when Maureen Fennemore and Judi Rowlands (Wargrave Theatre Workshop's wardrobe mistresses) will tell us *How to source and prepare costumes for Wargrave Theatre Workshop productions*, and on Tuesday, April 27th members will be able to take a *Walk of Ruscombe Woods*, guided by Stephen Loyd. Then, on Tuesday May 11th, Geoff Horsnell will give us an insight into his role as a lock-keeper on the Thames at *Shiplake Lock*.

All are welcome to our meetings, which begin at 8 pm in the Hannen Room, Mill Green. For more information about the Society, visit [www.wargrave.net/history](http://www.wargrave.net/history)