

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - July 2003

Outing to Taplow Court

In July, the Wargrave Local History Society had a private visit to Taplow Court. This large house, overlooking Boulter's Lock, is now-a-days the home to SGI-UK, a Buddhist lay organisation, but the house and site have a history that stretches back to at least the Iron Age - remains of a hill fort having been found on the site. From about 1000 BC, there was a large settlement there, the people being responsible for traffic on the Thames - notably of metal goods such as jewellery and weapons from the continent. The site was a good one - easily defended with good views all round, and a supply of fresh water at Bapsey Pond, where fish could also be reared.



A manor house has existed on the site from before 1066, and is recorded in the Domesday survey. The Tudor manor house burnt down in 1616, and the house that was built soon afterwards - probably by Thomas Hampson - forms the basis of the present house. It was extensively



remodelled in 1855 by the architect William Burn, for the then owner, Charles Pascoe Grenfell. Grenfell - whose family had lived in Taplow since 1794, and had mining interests in Cornwall - had bought the house from the 5th Earl of Orkney in 1852. In various places the monogram CPG has been incorporated into the brickwork or the interior decoration and fittings.

We made our way into the house through the main entrance - just as important visitors of the past would do. The entrance hall, and from it a smoking room, are - like other rooms in the house - furnished in a style in keeping with the house. The smoking room even had a small trap door by the hearth - so that Lord Desborough (as William Grenfell became) could have a bottle of his favourite tippie sent up to him! From the opposite side of the hallway the blue sitting room leads to the library -- used as a library for at least 200 years. This has a lincrusta ceiling, and a 1740 style marble fireplace, possibly by William Kent. The adjoining 'Norman Hall' is a survival from

the pre 1850s house. C P Grenfell liked it, with its Norman style "The Norman Hall" decoration, and had it kept, but the roof was raised and glazed to provide light for the interior. In Lord Desborough's time it was used as a ballroom and for the annual Christmas pantomime.

On the west side are two large connected 'blue' rooms - the drawing room and dining room - with views across the garden and croquet lawn. The original fireplaces remain, and in the dining room are portraits of Pascoe Grenfell and Lord Desborough. The latter - who served 2 terms as Mayor of Maidenhead, organised the original modern Olympic Games, in 1908.



The Norman Hall

The grounds of the house, which were sometimes used for local fetes etc, include the old Taplow churchyard and an Anglo Saxon burial mound (the best known example until Sutton Hoo was discovered). Although it was a pagan site in the 7th century, St Birinus is said to have preached from here in 635, and used the Bapsey Pond (hence its name) to baptise the local people, and a church was built soon afterwards. That was cleared away when the house was extended in 1855 - a new Taplow church having been provided in 1828 in the village. The family vaults remain below ground, but are no longer accessible, although an archeological survey was carried out in 1969.



During WW2, the Desboroughs moved away, and Taplow Court was used by St Stephens School from Folkestone. The family had intended to return after the war, but instead the house was leased to British Telecommunications Research, and then Plessey Electronics occupied it from 1963 until SGI acquired it in 1988.

Taplow Court and grounds are open to visitors during the summer on Sundays and Bank Holidays until 14th

September, (National Heritage Day) from 2 pm - 6 pm. The house also includes an exhibition charting the history of the house and site. Information is also available on the Taplow Court website, <https://sgi-uk.org/Local-Community/SGI-Centres/Taplow-Court> where there are more pictures.
