

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - July 2013

### Outing to Hughenden



In July, the Wargrave Local History Society's visit to 'a place of interest' was to Hughenden Manor, Benjamin Disraeli's home. On a gloriously sunny day, we were able to park in the shade of the woodland on the estate, before making our way to the Stable-block and on to the Manor itself.

On entering the house, the group made their way to the library, where an introductory talk about the house and Disraeli had been arranged.

With an 1851 portrait of Disraeli, with a characteristic 'kiss curl', as a background, it was explained that he was a most unlikely person to have risen to high political office. At that

time, it was considered necessary to have been educated at a well known public school and either Oxford or Cambridge universities, to have come from 'landed gentry', and to be a 'paid up member of the Church of England' to take up a career in politics. Disraeli came from a Jewish family, was educated at a school in Walthamstow, had not attended university, and his family were not large landowners. Although he had converted to Christianity as a child, many still viewed him as a Jew. He became quite a dandy, and made a living as a very successful novelist. His writings, however, often upset the 'establishment', and in later life they were published as his 'collected works' he edited out passages from the early novels as written with the 'intemperance of youth'.

Although Hughenden manor is referred to in the Domesday survey of 1086 (as Huchedene - the origins of the name are uncertain, but probably 'dene' refers to the valley where it is situated, and Huche to an Anglo Saxon who lived in the area), it is thought that this was just an area of land, and that there was no house there. There may have later been a farmhouse on the site, but the origins of the present Hughenden Manor are a house built in 1738. It was a 3 storey house, with the exterior walls covered in white stucco. When it was offered for sale in 1846, Disraeli managed to borrow the £39,000 for its purchase and furnishing. Disraeli now had the status to rise in the political world, although even those of his own party viewed him with suspicion.



*The study*

Disraeli was very fond of the Carolean / Jacobean era, and had work done on Hughenden to 'restore' it to that style. The stucco was removed, revealing the blue and red brickwork, the straight parapets replaced with stepped ones with pinnacles, etc. The fact that the house had not existed in the 17th century period did not seem to matter!



*The dining room*

In politics, Disraeli was rather critical of Robert Peel, and so was disapproved of by Queen Victoria. But he knew how to flatter her, ('when you come to royalty, you should lay it on with a trowel', he once said), to show respect for her and Prince Albert, and so gained her thanks when - for example - his speeches in Parliament ensured that the Albert Memorial was provided. He would speak to the Queen as a 'person' - even inscribing a set of his novels to her as 'We authors...!', whereas Victoria felt that Gladstone addressed her more like a 'public meeting'. When Disraeli was asked to define the difference between a misfortune and a calamity, he is reported to have said "If Gladstone fell into the Thames, that would be a misfortune, but if someone pulled him out again, that would be a calamity". In due

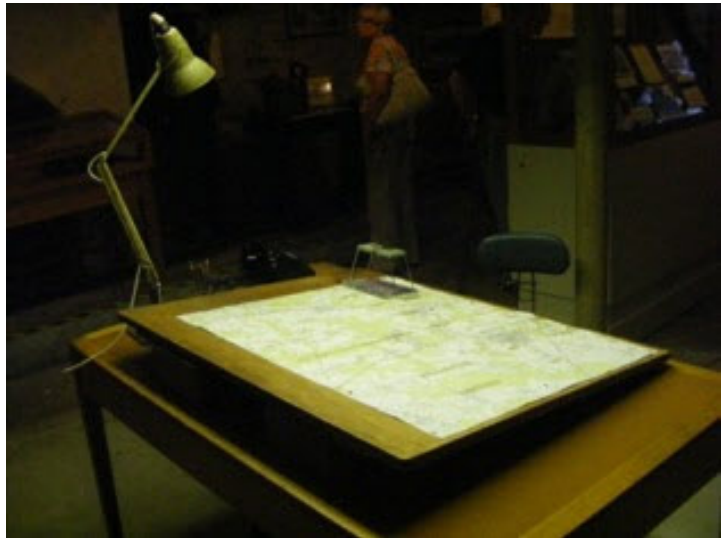
course, the Queen and Disraeli developed a mutual respect and support for each other. At that time, the order of precedence was that Emperors ranked higher than Kings. Disraeli, therefore, promoted the 'Royal Titles Act' making Victoria Empress of India - and of equal rank to the Russian Tsar. He had visited Hughenden, and would send him personal gifts - salmon from Balmoral, primroses from Osborne etc. When Disraeli died, she made a personal pilgrimage to Hughenden church to pay her respects - something the monarch did not do for a commoner otherwise.

The group were then able to explore the rooms in the house - many restored by the National Trust (who took over the house in 1947) using details from an 1881 inventory of the house. Disraeli's study - with the original furniture - looking just as it did in the 1880s. The dining room is set ready, under a large portrait of Queen Victoria, which she had presented to Disraeli in 1876, whilst a pair of lithographs (*right*) of Victoria and Albert hang over the fireplace in one of the bedrooms.



*Members studying the the exhibition (left)*

Visitors also learnt about the secret war-time map making work that was carried out at Hughenden (*right*). Known to the military as 'Hillside', highly accurate target maps were created for the RAF by draughtsmen working in the main rooms, and there were a photographic dark room, printing machinery etc, a despatch department, and provision of motor transport for distribution of the maps. The whole operation was top- secret (and Hughenden's part in the war-effort only became known about relatively recently).



Having looked around the house, the group then enjoyed a delicious afternoon cream tea (with fresh home-made scones) - an essential part of any Society visit! There was then time to explore the gardens and grounds of the estate, which looked stunning in the sunshine.

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The next meeting will be on Tuesday, October 8th, Norman Rees will recount some of his Experiences as an ITN Reporter, recalling some of his experiences reporting from many of the world's troublespots, and also as ITN's Washington correspondent for many years. This will be followed on Tuesday, November 12th, by a talk by Elise Fraser on The Archaeology of Silchester. Elise is the finds manager for the archaeological excavations at Silchester and therefore can give us a special insight into life in the Roman town.

The meetings start at 8pm in the Old Pavilion, on the Recreation Ground. For more information, visit [www.wargravehistory.org.uk](http://www.wargravehistory.org.uk)

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