

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - March 2025

A.G.M. and Memories of The Holt and Wargrave - Maureen Prince

Wargrave Local History Society's March meeting began with the AGM. The Chairman, Peter Halman, reported that it had been another successful year, with a varied programme of speakers, and an enjoyable visit to the Pendon Museum and Dorchester Abbey in Oxfordshire, followed by a guided walk discovering some of the history of Woodley. A committee was elected for the coming year, and the programme for 2025-26 was announced to members.

Following the formal business, Maureen Prince reminisced about living at The Holt and in Wargrave. The Holt is part of the parish of Wargrave just north of the Bath Road between Hare Hatch and Kiln Green, where Maureen was born in the family home, Holt Cottage. Her father was Alf Beckford, the village barber, and her mother's father had been chauffeur to W H Grenfell (later Lord Desborough).



The roads were much quieter in those days, and Maureen enjoyed riding her tricycle up and down the lane from the Bath Road (*in the background of the photograph, left*), later progressing to a larger bicycle. The family were keen cyclists, and would ride to the Ascot races each year, as well as around the villages and hamlets in the area.

Aged 5, she became a pupil at the Knowl Hill Church of England School which she attended until she was 11. The journey to and from the school was made using the Thames Valley bus service that ran from Reading to Maidenhead. One day in 1945 she - along with several other children and adults - got off the bus, when a Co-operative milk lorry crashed into the back of the bus, injuring several of those waiting to cross the Bath Road to get home. Her mother was waiting for her, and one of the other people told her that Maureen was lying dead in the road. Fortunately, she was unconscious, although badly injured, and taken in their car by 2 kind local people to Maidenhead Hospital, where she remained in a coma for 3 weeks. She was allowed home to rest after 6 weeks, but could not attend

school for 9 months, during which time the headmistress, Mrs Woodfield, visited regularly. On the first visit, she gave Maureen a toy koala bear, which she still has and treasures.

Pupils in the top class went by coach once a week to Martin's swimming pool at Waltham St Lawrence, and as a teenager Maureen would cycle there during the summer holidays with family and friends to improve her swimming and learn to dive. In the class photograph (*right*) from that time, Maureen is 2nd from the right on the front row.



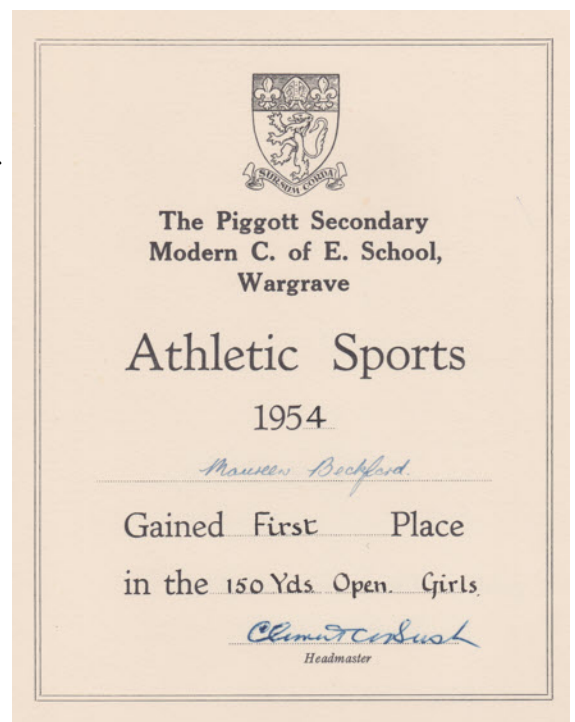
At the age of 11 she could have moved on to the school in Maidenhead. However, Maureen was interested in sporting activities and as her father, Alf Beckford, knew Mr Bush, headmaster of The Piggott School in Wargrave, it was arranged that she would go there. She became captain of the school hockey team, but although as Jane Stringer and Maureen were the only girls who ran well, they trained with the boys. She was awarded many certificates for both athletics and swimming, and the Victrix Ludorum cup in her last year at school, which was recorded on the school's honours board. During this time, she also represented the school including the inter-school event held at Wokingham Football Club - her certificates being presented by the famous boxer Freddie Mills. Her last year at school also included a tour to Somerset, visiting Wells, Bristol, Bath, Cheddar, Wookey Hole during the week's stay in Weston-super-Mare.

Maureen's sporting interests were not just at school, winning silver spoons for running at the village Coronation Sports Day in 1953, and she joined Wargrave Boat Club as a teenager, where she sculled with Peter Long from Loddon Drive. Preparing for the Wargrave and Shiplake Regatta one year, she entered the Wallingford Regatta, where she was set against the champion punter of the Thames - by the time he had finished the race, Maureen was not even halfway along the course!

Maureen had joined the church choir at Knowl Hill, which had 20 choristers in those days to lead the services for a full church. During the summer, the vicar, Rev.d Basil Clark, would take the children of the choir to visit places of interest such as St Alban's Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral and Winchester Cathedral. Maureen also recalled that with her friend Jacqueline Maskell she would ring the church bells before the morning service - often getting them out of sync as they were gossiping!

Maureen also went to evening classes held at the Polehampton School in Twyford, where she was taught touch typing by the Headmaster, Mr Farthing, and on leaving school, attended Boyne Hill College to learn Pitman shorthand and bookkeeping. Her father had Henry Wynmalen as one of his customers, and mentioned that Maureen was then looking for an office job. Mr Wynmalen suggested that Maureen telephone Miss Lawford, his Company Secretary, and an interview was arranged. As a result, she was offered the post of office junior, making teas for the architects, surveyors, draughtsmen etc, learning to operate the telephone switchboard, arranging the despatch of company brochures, and greeting visitors to the company. The firm, Buckwyn Construction Ltd, made army hutting, suspension buildings etc assembled from interlocking aluminium sections and galvanised steel. The visitors would come from the Ministry of Supply, the Swiss army, the German army and the big oil companies, and included people such as Henry Spencer Churchill (Winston Churchill's nephew) and Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck. In due course, Maureen also had the task of making up the wages for the 30 staff - who were paid in cash placed in small brown envelopes each week.

Henry Wynmalen died in 1964 following a heart attack, and for a while Mr Churchill would come to Hare Hatch from London each day, to keep the company going, it taking about 2 years to complete the existing contracts.



Henry's widow, Julia, then invited Maureen to become her private secretary. She was somewhat hesitant at first, as although she knew about the construction firm, Julia's interests were in Guernsey cattle, sheep and poultry. Julia had been born in Peru, and worked for the Peruvian embassy, and would spend 3 months each year in her native country, leaving Maureen to run the estate, which she did from 1966 to 1996. Julia was very much involved with the Guernsey Cattle Society, the Arab Horse Society and the British Horse Society, writing articles for their publications, and there was a lot to do. Twice a year agricultural returns had to be compiled, a task needing the use of a long carriage typewriter in those days to record the pedigree of each of the livestock. Often, she would need to work late as there would be 'one more letter to do' - and taken to be signed once typed out. Officially, Maureen worked part-time, but as Christmas Day and Boxing Day were not observed in the same way overseas, she would need to be at work to enable telephone calls to Peru, France, Holland etc. Julia had a stroke in 1994, and moved to a nursing home in Cambridgeshire, which meant Maureen had then to arrange for the selling of the Kingswood House estate - Julia Wynmalen dying in 1998.

Meanwhile, Maureen had married John Vincent Prince in 1961, and for the next 4 years they lived near Loddon Bridge, Woodley. Her father was friendly with Rev. d W Llewellyn-Jones, vicar of Wargrave, who had asked Alf if he knew of anyone who could take over as Clerk of the Woodclyffe Hostel, and secretary and treasurer for the Woodclyffe Hall. The vicar added that 'there is a flat that goes with these positions'. So Maureen and John moved to Wargrave, paying to have a new bathroom installed and the kitchen upgraded. One unforeseen problem was that the Yellow Pages directory listed the Woodclyffe Hostel, and people would telephone to try and book a room for the night - so Maureen had to get the entry removed from the book!

Berkshire County Council had supplied the first 100 books for a library at the Woodclyffe Hostel in April 1924, and after WW2, Miss Barbara Sharp and Mrs Elizabeth Corral, a qualified librarian, opened the library on a part-time basis in a room on the 2nd floor of the Hostel, next to the flat. Maureen took an interest in its work, undertook training for library work, and helping out during evening sessions. When Mrs Corral retired in 1972, Maureen was appointed as Wargrave's librarian. Being on the second floor, however, some readers found it difficult to climb the long flight of stairs, so (as Clerk of the Trust) Maureen arranged with the Working Men's Club and the County Librarian for the library to be relocated into the front room on the ground floor, from September 1980, Maureen choosing the decor, curtains, etc. However, in October 1990 the library



Maureen in the 2nd floor library in 1977, with the reprint edition of Herbert Reid's History of Wargrave,



had to close temporarily, as rot found in the building had to be treated. For the next 3 months, Maureen worked on the mobile library when it visited Wargrave, or in other local libraries, before returning all the books to the shelves in time for the re-opening in January 1991. In due course, Maureen retired in 1999, having worked for Berkshire County Council for 27 years, followed by 2 years for the Wokingham Unitary Authority.

The library celebrated its 90th birthday in 2014 with several former staff (*left, with Maureen in the centre of the back row*), and its centenary in 2024.

Maureen's other interests included the Wargrave Wine Circle, for which she was Chairperson for many years. As well as a programme of talks, the Circle had tours to wine making regions, such as Oporto in Portugal in 1973, and subsequently to France, Germany, Madeira and Italy. Other activities included summer barbecues, held in the garden of Herbert and Brenda Paramor's garden at Hare Hatch, and Christmas parties, with holly and other greenery used to decorate the room provided by Harold Tester. Another annual event was a dance, held at Bulmershe School in Woodley, with up to 250 people taking part.

Maureen became Wargrave's fundraiser for the Royal National Institute for the Blind, her grandmother and husband both having impaired vision. This included house-to-house collections, Min Preston and Vera Bird collecting by the Woodclyffe Hall, and Mike Bridge, Akela, taking the Cubs to the garden centre at Hare Hatch. And Di Bush arranging collections at Crazies Hill. In 1982, Maureen arranged for a male voice choir to give a concert in the Woodclyffe Hall. People from as far as Basingstoke came to enjoy the music and a ploughman's supper, and over £200 was raised (a valuable sum then) for the RNIB. Funds were also raised by an annual dance held in Loddon Hall, Twyford, with raffle prizes donated by the Sultan of Oman and local businesses. For her work supporting the RNIB, Maureen was presented with several certificates signed by the Director General.



Maureen presenting a cheque for £206 to Peter Walsh, area appeals organiser for the RNIB.

Maureen's grandfather, father and husband were all members of the Ancient Order of Foresters, so it was natural that she also became a member of this friendly society which provides help and support to its members. Their fund raising supports charities such as the Thames Valley Air Ambulance, the Trussel Trust and various cancer charities, Maureen having served as chairman of the local branch many times.

Other organisations in which Maureen has taken an active part have included the Wargrave Women's Club, of which she was a founder member in 1968. As well as a programme of talks, trips and garden parties, they took over running the annual Pancake Races, from a branch of the Women's Institute, in turn handing over to the Wargrave Pre-School. Being an active sports person, she joined Aspect Golf Club and later Badgemore, moving to play at Hennerton in 2005.



In 2004, Maureen resigned as the Clerk to the Woodclyffe Hostel Trustees, moving to a retirement bungalow in Recreation Road. To mark her 39 years of service, she was presented by the Trustees with a framed painting (*left*) created by artist Sally Castle of the Woodclyffe Hostel.

Maureen concluded by saying she has so far had an interesting and busy life, and now has many Christian friends - as well as her 2 long haired dachshunds!

For more information about the society, visit the website at www.wargravehistory.org.uk
