

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - August 2025

Local History visit to Hall Place

August is a month when Wargrave Local History Society does not have a formal meeting, but on one of the hottest days of 2025 a group of members had an informal visit to Hall Place, at Burchetts Green.

Hall Place, is known to many as the home of the Berkshire College of Agriculture - now part of the Windsor Forest Colleges Group, and had been the subject of a presentation to the Society by Simon Polley and Janet Robertson, and they were the guides for the visit.

The site has seen a number of additional buildings provided in recent years, as the College curriculum has expanded beyond the purely agricultural. As the mansion house and its surrounding grounds have a long history, a check has to be made for anything of possible archaeological significance before building work can take place. One such find was a large well-like structure in the area where the learning centre and reception area was built, and this appeared to have been part of a private gas works - to supply the house before supplies were generally available.

The site includes extensive farmland, with some areas dedicated to housing a wide variety of livestock - although many of them were wisely taking shelter in the shade, or lying down, as a way to cope with the heat of the day. Simon said that probably the cutest of the livestock that they have are the pygmy goats. Now-a-days, however, the range of courses offered by the College is much wider than just 'agricultural'. Some, such as motor engineering, have a farming connection (on maintenance of tractors and other farm equipment), but others, like health & social care or performing arts, cover a breadth of interests. There are other animal related courses, and the College holds a zoo certificate, allowing it to keep a range of animals - including some quite exotic species. As some of these pose a danger to humans, there is a 'traffic light' system, with red, amber or green notices, to advise on the special care needed with some of these - one of the courses available being animal management.



WLHS members visiting the BCA zoo



A n otter - keeping cooler having a drink under the tree



Whilst outside looking at the more agricultural areas, the sound of a (noisy) laughing kookaburra could be heard, although when the group were close to its enclosure in the zoo it was 'not laughing now!'. The slender tailed meerkats, (left) though, certainly 'took notice' of the visiting group - those not hiding in the shadows, anyway - and the common squirrel monkey clung on to the inside of the window of its shaded enclosure - probably pleased that it was not out in the heat of the day with the group members. The collections in the exotic animals building included snakes, some very small insects, and some small blue frogs - which, considering their ability to produce a deadly poison, were fortunately kept behind glass.

As well as the education aspects of the BCA site, the group also saw some of the historic features. The upkeep of these heritage assets, not being just for teaching and learning, has to be funded separately by the College. Amongst the oldest of these are the line of trees either side of the main driveway from the Burchetts Green road, and the statue of Diana (right), which is thought to date from about 1695. The Hall Place estate had been the home of the East, later Clayton-East, family, and Simon recalled that if the family had won at one of the Ascot races, they would throw money for villagers out of their carriage on their return. Hall Place itself was not the first house on the site, the present main house (*below*) being completed in 1735. The upper floors are used for teaching and administrative offices, whilst the main William East room on the ground floor has elaborate Georgian decorative plaster-work to the walls and on the ceiling above the chandelier (*below, right*) and are one reason why the house is Grade 1 listed.



The William East Room now has many uses - including as a work space for performing arts courses. Other buildings were added to the mansion, the former stables gateway having the date 1870 set into the arch above (*right*).

It was a most enjoyable and interesting visit, with the College's hospitality much appreciated by the group.



For more information about the society, visit our website at <https://www.wargravehistory.org.uk>