

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - January 2009

Hare Hatch

The Hannen Room was packed in January, when Peter Johnson, formerly the farm manager at Bear Place Farm, and a past chairman of the Berkshire Local History Association, spoke about Hare Hatch.

Peter told us about many of the principal houses in Hare Hatch. Large houses became popular along the Bath Road in the 18th century, when many people would travel that way to visit Bath, and liked the idea of a house with a prospect of the main road. Starting at the eastern end., Peter told us that Castleman's was so named as it was thought that the ancient remains discovered nearby at Weycock Hill were of a castle. In fact they were a Roman temple, and when archaeological investigations took place, several coins and medallions were found. The temple was found to have been octagonal (unusual in Britain) with walls about 8ft high. Of Castleman's itself, Peter told us that an interesting will of one of its earlier owners, John Gomell, gave a detailed description not of jewellery etc that might have been expected, but of items such as bedding, kitchen utensils, furniture, and similar household possessions.

The next house, now Linden Hill, was possibly on part of a manor house. An old ruinous house had been bought by the son of the 7th Duke of Abercorn with the intention of creating a new house. He wrote, in 1753, that it was 'coming on', but 3 years later, whilst commanding the Royal Navy ship 'Lancaster', he fell from the deck and drowned., and so did not see his plans come to fruition.

The Grange was a house previously called Hawthorns. It had been built by Philip Nind (vicar of Wargrave 1784 - 1815), and then passed to his son Philip Trant Nind, who was vicar for the next 11 years. It later belonged to the Lord Chief Justice, then the Bulkeley family, and was occupied from 1902 by the 1st Lord Remnant. The Remnants later moved to Bear Place, which had been rebuilt in the late 18th century by Moris Ximenes - with instructions to the builders to re-use as much as possible from the previous house, and for a cost of no more than £800. Moris Ximenes had been a high ranking Spanish official, but had for some reason moved to England, and whilst living here, founded the 'Wargrave Rangers', a local militia group, providing £25000 for horses, uniforms etc. Peter suggested that they may have been used more to quell local riots, however, than against Napoleon! Peter became the farm manager for the 2nd Lord Remnant, and they would meet on a Thursday evening. On one in particular, he saw a large animal that appeared to be a Great Dane. As he got closer it seemed to grow larger - (as it arched its back) but then ran off at speed and vanished. On telling this to Lord Remnant, he replied that 'when he took brandy with his evening meal, he should have more water with it'. However, Peter was vindicated when other reports were made of a cougar in the area.

Peter also told us about several houses to the south of the Bath Road - Little Scarletts, Old House and Hill House. Their history becomes confusing, as what is now Scarletts was Little Scarletts, and the original Scarletts is now called The Old House!

Peter concluded with mention of Blakes Farm. The Castells and Fromonts had owned it for about 400 years. The Castells were also basket makers, and owned osier beds on the river up as far as Newbury. The land here is made of clay over chalk, and Peter then explained how if the clay layer is broken, rain can penetrate the chalk, creating a larger and larger hole - hence the name Dene Pit - and various such cavities have opened up in this way over time.

The next meeting is on Tuesday March 10th when the Society will hold its AGM (when the programme for the 2009-10 will be announced) followed by a *Down Memory Lane* evening.