

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - September 2011

The Royal Collection of Models of State Coaches

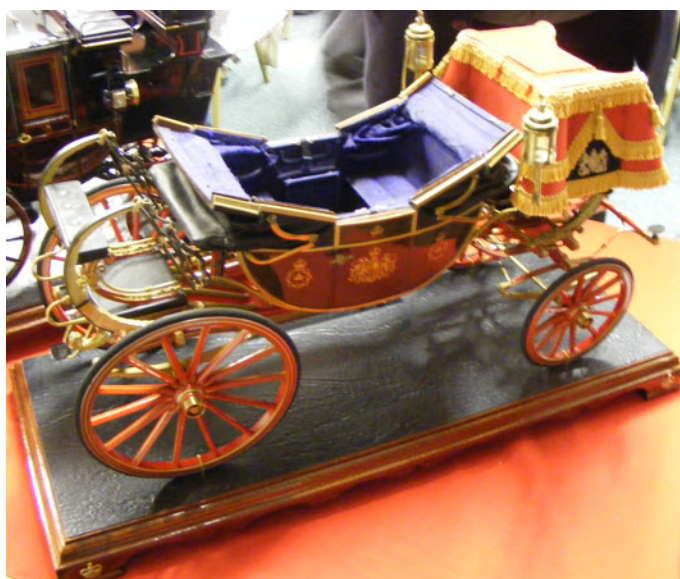


The September meeting of the Wargrave Local History Society was the first to be held at the new meeting room at the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground (left). The Chairman of the Parish Council, Dick Bush, warmly welcomed the Society to the venue, which the Council has provided and equipped for village organisations to use - its location, facilities and car parking will no doubt be appreciated by a variety of Wargrave's clubs and societies as a place to gather.

The Society was also pleased (right) to welcome Pete Holloway, who kindly donated to the Society the Terrier to the Wargrave Tithe Apportionment, dated 1840, which had been in his Father's possessions. The document lists every plot of land in the parish, noting the landowner, occupier, and describes the land, its state of cultivation, with the measure of its acreage.



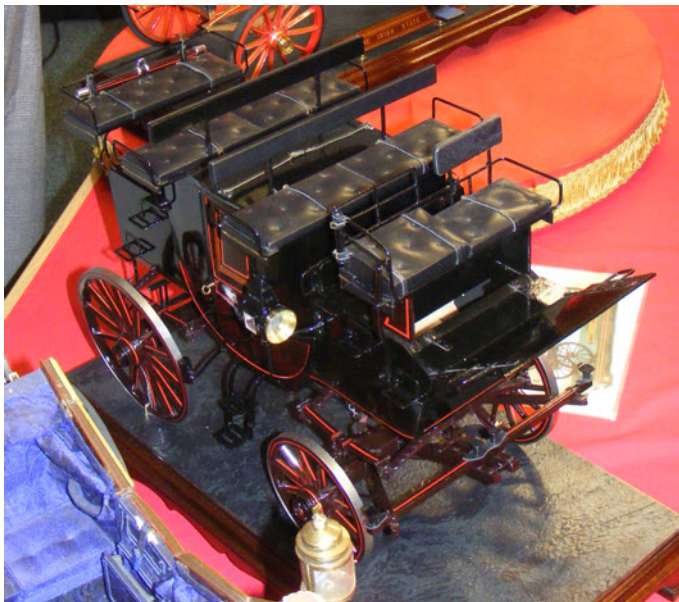
The subject for the main presentation of the evening was about *The Royal State Coaches*. Peter Smith is the maker of a series of superb large scale models of carriages from the Royal Mews. He used these to describe the various features of the different types, as well as explaining how they were re-created in model form.



The first of these was an 1838 State Landau - a carriage still used regularly when foreign heads of state are visiting this country. It is considered as a 'Town Coach', for short journeys, and as such the four horses are driven from the box seat at the front. Peter's model is built to a scale of 1½" - foot (ie one eighth full size), using the same type of materials as for the originals, leather, brass, steel as appropriate. The bodywork is built of a beech frame with thin birch panelling, whilst the wheels are constructed in the traditional way a wheelwright would do - with individual spokes to join the felloes (parts which make the wheel rim) to the hub. As the Palace do not have any plans of them, the process begins by taking detailed notes of the measurements and details from the original - about 25 pages for a smaller coach

such as this, with the construction taking about 14 months. All the details are reproduced accurately - and the colours are certain to be correct, as the paint is - with permission - obtained from Buckingham Palace.

Peter next showed us Prince Philip's Park Drag (below). The original of this is not a 'State Coach', but privately owned by the Prince, who used it for competitive driving. The basic style is like the old London - Bristol mail coaches, but the Drag was built using mahogany and lots of leather. (Mahogany was an



expensive wood, as it had all to be brought to England by sailing ships that could only carry a small load at a time). The Park Drag is now-a-days used for shooting trips in Windsor Great Park, the staff riding inside and guests on top (the seats being 7' 6" up giving a good view). The coach could cater for a picnic, with baskets for food carried under the front, and drink being carried in lead lined mahogany boxes in the back. All of this is faithfully reproduced on the model - the boxes, for example, having the correct number of miniature dovetail joints at each corner. Travelling on such coaches was probably more hazardous than on the roads of today - if the horses took fright and bolted, the whole carriage would likely topple over, throwing passengers

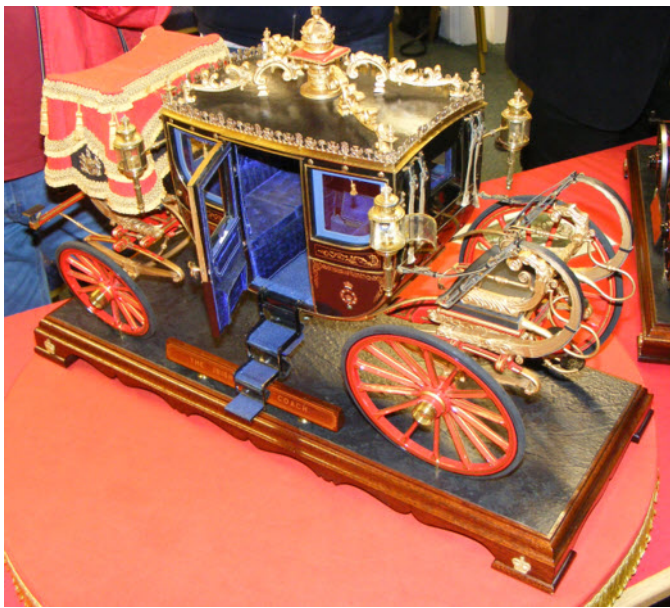
The Scottish State Coach (right) had begun life in 1830 as a Landau, owned by a previous Duke of Cambridge, but was altered from a town coach to one for the open road - the driving box being removed and the horses driven postillion style. As such, it would be driven - with changes of horses *en route* - from London to Windsor or Sandringham. The interior has a lining of coffee coloured silk - and the model accurately replicates this the opening doors and steps - even the miniature carriage lamps open. As with all the vehicles, each wheel is properly dished, and set so that the spokes are vertical at the point of contact with the road.



Queen Alexandra's State Coach (left) is the one used to carry the Imperial State Crown from Buckingham Palace to the Houses of Parliament for the State Opening. Originally this had a flat roof, but it was later rebuilt with a domed roof, arched windows, and bevelled glass for the glazing. In reproducing this, Peter had to bevel the 1mm thick window glass by hand - such is the attention to detail.

Next we saw the 1902 State Landau - which was the carriage used to carry the bride and groom back to Buckingham Palace after the Royal wedding in April. This is a large carriage, at 19' 6" long, and 9'

high with the hood up. All of these coaches have a body slung on straps from the undercarriage, so it tends to sway in all directions - the footman riding on the back (over the road springs) has a more comfortable ride than the passengers! The model (right) includes miniature windows that correctly drop into the opening door - a challenge to fit the glazing between the hinges and the working door lock. As with all the open coaches, the model has a properly folding hood.



The last carriage Peter showed us was the Irish State Coach (left). Originally built by the Lord Mayor of Dublin (himself a coachbuilder) in 1851, it is armoured with steel panels in the floor, roof and sides. The roof has intricate scroll work, recreated in lime wood for the model, whilst all the clothwork he has hand stitched. This miniature took 2 years to make - just painting the coats of arms and scroll work on the coach sides took 8 weeks. The body paintwork is built up of 4 or 5 coats of matt paint, and then 6 coats of varnish are applied to give the correct final finish.

Not surprisingly, Peter has won many trophies and medals for his exquisite models - all painstakingly researched.

The next meeting takes place on Tuesday, November 8th, when Derek Brown from the Consuta Trust, will tell us about the old steam launch, *Consuta*, built for use by the umpires at Henley Royal Regatta, and the work to restore it, whilst on Tuesday, December 13th we will hold our *Christmas Party*. The meetings start at 8pm in the Pavilion, on the Recreation Ground.

All are welcome to our meetings - for more information visit www.wargravehistory.org.uk
