

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - November 2005

Curiosities in the Chilterns

At the November meeting of the Wargrave Local History Society, Alan Copeland delighted the audience with his slide presentation.

With an entertaining commentary, Alan took us to see many 'unusual' features in the area from Reading through to Berkhamsted, and beyond. Starting in the Forbury Gardens, where the Victorian gardens have been recently recreated, is the Maiwand Lion - said to be the largest cast iron statue in the country. The lion's legs are a curiosity - no lion would ever stand with both legs on the same side 'forward' together - but necessary to make the 16 ton statue stable! Nearby is the memorial to Henry West - 7ft 0¼ in wide - as were the rails on the GWR he worked for when killed by a whirlwind at Reading Station in 1840. The (now removed) blue plaque to William Hogarth, however, records his dates, and that "he never lived here"!! (in Zinzan Street). Alan included several other 'features' of Reading.

To the east, passing a roadside water pump by the sign to Lands End in Charvil, we next looked at White Waltham. A Victorian drinking fountain, built in 1897 as a source of pure water for the villagers had gradually become overgrown, and was at risk of permanent damage - fortunately, Alan was able to show that it had been rescued from the encroaching vegetation. The village stocks by the church Alan pointed out, also included a whipping post.

Maidenhead features a green phone box, whilst in Cookham we saw not only the Tarry Stone, 'at which sports were held before 1507', but also Vine Cottage. In the 1930s, a noisy group of revellers from the 'Bell and Dragon' along the road had woken the occupant as she fought outside. This led to him placing a sign on the wall of the house "Don't park cars here. All fighting to be over by 10pm".

In Windsor, Riverside station records the build date (1851) and VR and PA on the wall which has a series of tall gates along its length. These were provided to enable guardsmen on horseback to ride onto the platform to greet the Queen when she arrived by train. Sadly, the pavement mounted clock on Castle Hill, outside Dyson's (the former royal clock keeper) shop is no longer visible - it is thought to have been covered by tarmac. Also in Windsor is Bachelor's Acre - with an obelisk noting roasting of ox and eating of plum puddings to mark the 50th year of the reign of George III. The land was for a while used as a car park, until a local lady proved in court, at her expense, that a permanent covenant prevented this. Opposite is Western Cottage - where S J Stone, curate at Windsor from 1863-70, wrote the hymn 'The Church's One Foundation'. (See also the September 2005 talk on Hymn Writers in Berkshire).

Further north, through Eton and we came to Old Amersham, with its 'lock up' little jail. The Constables House has a notice, dated 1811, that the magistrates for the Hundred desired 'to apprehend all common beggars, ballad singers and other vagrants'. The furthest north Alan 'took'

us was Gaddesdon - where a bizarre shape chimney is called Jarman's Coffin. Jarman was possibly involved with witchcraft, and said he would remain there in spirit after his death - in due course the house had to be exorcised.

In the middle of the Chilterns, near The Lee, is a large ship's figurehead. The Liberty family had bought the Manor House, and the figure came from a ship that had been bought to provide timber for Liberty's shop in Regent Street. Not far away at Wendover remain some railway level crossing gates - the branch to RAF Halton having long gone, the builder who bought the land aligned his bungalow to the gates, which mark his drive. Halton Village has some interesting cottages, provided by Lord Rothschild for workers on his estate, with murals depicting farm or woodland workers, whilst at Ivinghoe remain an old Thatch Hook and a Man Trap - both now safely secured to a wall.

Further south, the village of Hazlemere includes a topiary of Goldilocks and the Three Bears - which future owners of the house are required to maintain, whilst at West Wycombe are reminders of the Hell Fire Club - at the church and in the caves.

Alan showed us many more features of the area than can be mentioned here - but some can be seen on his website at www.curiosities.co.uk
