

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - February 1999

### The Province of Wealdham

This old name, *The Province of Wealdham*, relates to the area around White Waltham, Shottesbroke and Waltham St Lawrence.

Luke Over began with the history of some of the eighteen places in Britain called Waltham. It is said to be one of the oldest settlement names, derived from Wealdham, which meant forest settlement. They all appear to be clearings from original forests - in the local case, Windsor Forest. Nearly all of the Walthams are situated near a Roman road, and the majority were owned at one time by the monasteries. Hardham Church, at Waltham in Kent, has 13th century wall paintings, whilst Bishop's Waltham had the palace for the Bishop of Winchester, and Waltham Abbey relates to the Abbey founded there in 1160 by Harold, Earl of Wessex.

The earliest history uncovered locally is at Waltham St Lawrence, where a sizable Roman temple was found, virtually on the (unproven) road from St Albans to Silchester. The hexagonal temple was excavated by Richard Neville in 1847, when some of it remained above ground. It now is only marked by crop marks, visible from the air. A settlement was usually associated with such temples, so there was probably a Roman station on the route. A Roman villa also probably existed at Littlewick Green.

The Province of Wealdham is mentioned in documents for 940. Most of White Waltham was given to Chertsey Abbey by Edward the Confessor. The Abbey used it for supplies for the monks, and they had a small church there. Parts of the present church are 12th century, but most of it is Victorian "restoration". An old set of stocks and whipping post remain outside. A drawing by Thomas Hearne, about 1740, also shows a large spire on the church. Hearne thought that he had found, about 1712, a Roman villa at Berry Grove, the local manor house (within the present Waltham Place Estate). It used bricks similar to those at the temple in Waltham St Lawrence, but was about 3 times the size of an average Roman villa. It seems more likely that this was actually the remains of the original Chertsey Abbey manor house, built using reclaimed Roman materials. The present Waltham Place dates from 1634. The nearby Heynes Croft Lake may have been the original fish pond for Chertsey Abbey - it is certainly very ancient. The Abbot of Chertsey's tenant at White Waltham was Turoid - thought to be the designer of the Bayeux Tapestry. The other part of White Waltham was the manor of Heywood (a name possibly derived from Harold's Wood). It later belonged to the Sawyer family.

Shottesbroke was noted as a separate manor as early as 1007. It is basically just a manor house and church, with no other houses. At the Domesday survey it belonged to Alward, the King's goldsmith. Gold was made there, due to the supply of wood for charcoal, for some 2-300 years. This was probably at the site of Smewin's Farm. Sir William Trussel built the church in 1337 (a previous one was noted in Domesday), and started a medieval collegiate behind there, although nothing still stands of this. Later, Shottesbroke was occupied by the Vansittart family, and by the Smith's - currently Sir John - for 200 years.

The railway was put through the area in 1840, and Luke showed some fascinating old pictures, including Waltham Sidings Signal Box. This was on the site of Heywood's Gallows. The ghost of a woman wrongly condemned to death was said to be responsible for several strange happenings there. Nearby, several murders and similar tragedies happened at Heywood Park in the 1930s. The reputation became so bad that no-one wished to live there. A local builder, however, wanted to develop the area for housing, so the name was changed to Woodlands Park, after which the strange happenings ceased.

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