

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - March 2026

A.G.M. and “Bring and Tell”

Wargrave Local History Society's March meeting began with the AGM. The Chairman, Peter Halman, reported that it had been another successful year, with a varied programme of speakers, and an enjoyable visit in July to the Rural Life Museum at Tilford, in Surrey, whilst in August a smaller group visited the Berkshire College of Agriculture at Burchetts Green. The society's finances were also in good condition, with membership numbers remaining at a healthy level. A committee was elected for the coming year and the programme for 2026-27 was announced to members, who expressed their thanks to the committee for their work over the past year.

Following the formal business of the evening, the society held a “Bring and Tell” time, when various members who had brought along an ‘item of interest’ to show and tell the meeting about. Some were of ‘local interest’, some of ‘historic interest’, and some came into both categories.

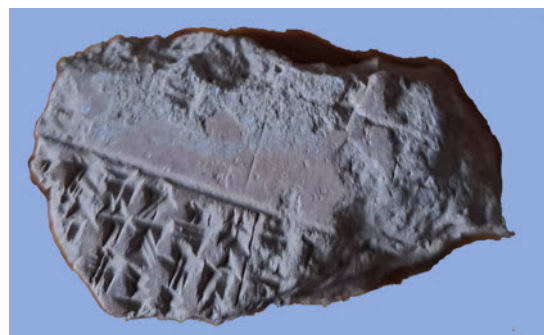
First to be shown was probably the smallest one, brought by Peter. The main part of this silver coloured medal was about the size of a thumbnail. Around the outside the wording read *Wargrave & District Rifle Club*, and in the centre it had been engraved *1910, Best Shot, Wargrave Sectn* and on the back it had the name A Steer. Research had found that Albert Steer had a business as a house painter - employing others - and had lived in Victoria Road. The road was not numbered at that time, and even the house number - 13 - recorded as Albert's address in 1942 bore no relationship to the present day numbering. Peter also recounted the story of the largest item shown during the evening - the glass fronted wooden case that had been fixed to the village police station to display the Thames Valley bus company's timetables.



Next was Kate, who had brought along a delightful telegram case, containing an early 1900s Telegraph Form. The outside was made of leather, with a silk lining, whilst on the cover both the script word *Telegram* and the corner protective pieces were of hallmarked silver. These revealed that it had been made in Birmingham in 1909, the silversmith being Charles Penny Brown. In an elegant household, if maybe a telegram had been received with an invitation to afternoon tea or evening dinner, the butler would use a case such as this to present it to the addressee. It was a nice glimpse of life in the era long before emails, Tik-Tok or similar modern means of communication.



Tina had without doubt brought the oldest items to show to the meeting. They had been found whilst clearing a family home. They had looked like a collection of small stones, but a young member of the family had said that the marks on one (*right*) looked like hieroglyphics. He was nearly right, as they turned out to be cuneiform writing. It was subsequently verified by the British Museum, who formally gave Tina permission to keep it. The other two items from her collection were a piece of a roof tile from the classical period (*below, left*), and a shard of pottery from a Roman amphora (*below right*). Although such things could be seen in museums, Tina said that to be able to hold such things in her hand was a special feeling. She did not know how the box of things had come to be in the garage - possibly gathered by her husband's aunt who used to travel a lot in the Middle East.



Helen described what she had brought to show as part of a personal story. Again it was whilst clearing a family home, when she thought much would end up being thrown away, that her brother had found a box of photographs under a bed. They had not been seen before, and they had no idea who the people might be, or where they had been taken. One of them (*below left*) was a family group, whilst there was also a picture of a large farmhouse (*below right*) - the porch of which was the background to the family picture. It was thought there would be no record of these people, although the family's background was in Somerset. Helen's daughter suggested that using a family history research site they might discover more - and one of the girls was identified as Helen's paternal grandmother, with the family photo being dated to about 1907. A visit to the Burnham on Sea area found that not only did the farmhouse still exist, it had the same name (although a major road passes close in front). A true piece of detective work!

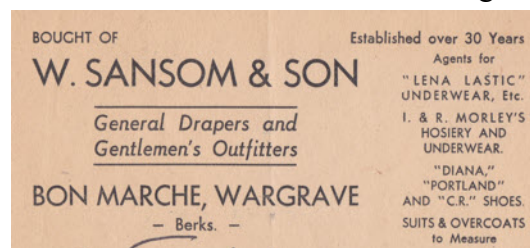


Patsy was wearing the item she had brought to talk about. It was a 40 year old hallmarked silver replica of a medieval pilgrim's badge. The original had been found in the River Thames close to Chertsey bridge. Close to here had been Chertsey Abbey, which, along with Reading Abbey, was one of the principal such places in pre-reformation England. Pilgrims would visit such ecclesiastical places to pay homage to the relics they housed, and such badges were sold as a souvenir of the visit.

Eton College had been founded about 600 years ago, and like the abbeys, was endowed with valuable relics, attracting what we would now call a colossal tourist trade. The College is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Assumption, and this badge portrays her at the top, with 2 angels beside to support her (part of a symbol appearing in the College courtyard). Below is a rebus - a pictorial representation - showing the letter E and a barrel. The old name for a barrel was a tun - so it represents E-tun (Eton). Right at the bottom is the school crest. It was found during dredging operations in the 1980s, and sent to the Museum of London. They placed it on loan to the College, where a lady there who taught silversmithing skills made six replicas in solid silver.



Maureen's Arcadian crested china figurine had been given to her by her father about 50 years ago and portrays the bulldog that belonged to the Charles Dickens character Bill Sykes. This particular example has a crest design on the back, to represent Wargrave, with the Berkshire stag and tree, and a coxed crew at the top. On the bottom, as well as the Arcadian maker's mark, is the name of the shop who sold it, W Sansom's Bon Marche, Wargrave.



William Sansom bought the drapery and outfitter's business (*as on the receipt heading, above*) in Wargrave High Street from a Mr Hatchard in 1897, although the actual property belonged to Mr Wicks, who ran The White Hart at the time, Mr Sansom obtaining the freehold in 1922. He had taken over the running of the post office in 1899. Previously that had been run by Henry Bolton, who was a boot and shoe dealer at Tinkerbell Cottage as well the postmaster. However, he delivered to his customers at the same time as taking the mail. The GPO objected to him doing that whilst being paid by them to deal with the post. His reaction was to dump the bags of mail in the (then unmade-up) road, and - so the account goes - William Sansom picked it up and from then on was the postmaster. William died in 1953, when his son, Cyril, took over the drapery business and post office. The drapery business closed in about 1971, but the High Street post office remained there, although the village now only has a mobile post office van for an hour or so on two mornings a week.