

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - June 2017

Wargrave Village Festival

The first of the Wargrave Local History Society's events during June, as part of the Wargrave Village Festival, was a conducted local history walk. This continues to be a very popular event, as tickets were fully sold out – again! It was a pleasant Sunday afternoon when –dry but not over hot – when the participants gathered on Mill Green. In two groups, they then had a gentle stroll around Mill Green, Church Street and the High Street, hearing about people, buildings and episodes from over 900 years of Wargrave's history as they went.



The Society's second event was "*More About Antiques*". This was another 'sell-out' occasion, which took place in the Woodclyffe Hall on a Thursday evening. The well-known antiques expert Thomas Plant – familiar to many from several television series, and a director of Special Auction Services at Newbury, was accompanied by his fellow director Neil Shuttleworth. They had held a 430 lot auction of dolls and teddy bears earlier in the day – at least one potential buyer had brought along their teddy bear "to see if it would get on with one they were thinking of buying"

Members of the audience had been invited to bring along a small item, and Thomas and Neil then (alternately) described and valued many of these (images of each object being displayed on a large screen on the stage, so the audience could have a clear view of what was being described).

The items ranged from 17th century to the second half of the 20th, whilst values ranged from 'very little' to around £1000. One desirable item, it was said, "would sell in a desert with no phone lines"! The age of an item was not a guide to its value, the oldest being that which would likely command the lowest price. In some, cases, the value was dependent on what was currently fashionable, for others the 'condition' was the most important factor. One item brought along was a 1930s toy car, with its original box and all the accessories, was likely to reach £200 - £300 in auction. Toy collecting was a niche market, but although many were made, they were scarce in such good condition. Other items had 'personal' associations for their owners – a ceremonial truncheon that had belonged to a one time Mayor of Neath, or a 200 year old mourning pendant that had been 'handed down' through the family – and was described as a 'work of art'. Not all were 'appreciated' by their owners – one had brought along a small statue, and when asked if they 'liked it' declared "No" – it normally was left in the spare bedroom! A Clarice Cliffe bowl had "been in Mum's garage for years". On being given a valuation, it will "come out of Mum's garage now". This item prompted Thomas to comment that "the devil invented bubble wrap and sticky tape" (although no sticky tape on this occasion) – he recalled that sometimes objects arrived wrapped in such, but not in a strong enough box, and so the contents might be at risk of damage if they fell from the packaging.

Thomas and Neil are both ambassadors for the Alexander Devine Children's Hospice. That had raised about £4 million for providing the building, but further money would be needed to provide some of the equipment that would be needed - Neil would be taking part in the Amsterdam full marathon as part of that fund raising.

Thomas went on to explain that the work of auctioneers and valuers traditionally dealt with “3 D’s” – death, divorce and debt – but now-a-days a bigger factor was “downsizing”. They hold free valuation days on Wednesdays, at their premises in Newbury. Sometimes these can produce spectacular results. One lady had a collection of ‘bits and bobs’ in a carrier

bag, most of which were of no great monetary value, but with them was a 14cm high bronze ganesh. She was happy to put it into auction with a valuation of £100 - £200 – but being catalogued online, it created a lot of interest, and offers to purchase for £1,000, if taken out of the sale. English law is that the vendor has to be told of the offer – but she was also told that there was a lot of other interest – so it was put for auction. Phone lines to London and Hong Hong were arranged --- and eventually it sold for £14,000. Strangely, another ganesh in the same catalogue valued at £40 - £60 did not even sell!



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There was an ‘interesting story’ to each and every item – maybe about the object itself (one that looked like folding opera glasses – but why would a theatre-goer require a magnet and small mirror? (both built in to it). The answer was that it was for use by a gentleman traveller / explorer in the early 1900s). A more modern item was a gold Stratton compact that had been a gift from the owner’s father to her mother. A plain compact would not be particularly interesting, but the father had travelled by the Queen Elizabeth, and the front of the compact bore an illustration of the liner. Being ‘Cunard related’, it would be of greater interest to collectors. Similarly, when looking at a pair of delicate Victorian fans, Neil said he ‘could fill an evening’ talking about. A ‘really pretty’ scent bottle that had belonged to a ‘spinster aunt’, Thomas explained would have taken a lot of effort to make – being blown in plain glass, then dipped into cobalt blue glass, then the decoration cut with a wheel, after which it was fitted with a silver top. The owner was advised that as the stopper was stuck, no attempt should be made to remove it.

During the interval, a presentation of views from the Society archive screened for the audience to enjoy.

As we have reached the centenary of the middle part of World War 1, at the end of June the Society presented a display during the Village Festival Fete of photographs and documents showing how Wargravians were involved at that time – not just those who ‘joined the colours’, but those who gave support ‘at home’ in the village, and many questions about village history were answered for visitors during the afternoon.



The Society will resume its programme of after the summer break on Tuesday, September 12th, with a talk on the history of *The Berkshire Women's Institute*, in the meeting room at the Old Pavilion on the Recreation Ground, Wargrave, starting at 8pm. for more information about the Society, visit our website www.wargravehistory.org.uk/