

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - March 2021

A.G.M. - The Society's Archives

The March meeting of the Wargrave Local History Society began with the AGM. The past year, when meetings had to be moved on-line, was reviewed, a committee elected, and details of the 2021-22 programme were given.

Each month over the past year, the Society has shared with members an item from its archive, and following the formal part of the evening, Society Secretary Peter Delaney gave an illustrated presentation on the origins of the collection.

The Society's first chairman was the late Derek Bird, born and bred in the village, He had gathered photographs, documents, and made copious notes on the village's history. He kindly allowed copies to be made for the early local history exhibitions in the village, and those were the start of the collection, along with others that were copied for the production of the Book of Wargrave.

An example is the one of the village fire brigade in 1931 outside their newly built fire station, with W H Easterling (the 'Guvnor') sat at the front of the running board. Derek's notes also recorded the names of the firemen - most of whom worked for Easterlings and had built the fire station.



Sometimes, acquisitions have come from being 'in the right place at the right time', as with the next large part of the collection, which consists of photographs, and some early documents, from the Piggott School, starting with the laying of the foundation stone by the Bishop of Oxford in 1939. These had been in store under the school stage, but following an inspection by a fire officer, the area had to be cleared. The Society was able to rescue them, and in due course all were catalogued and stored in archivally safe materials. All kinds of activities are included – craft projects, animal husbandry, sports events, drama productions, or school trips, and there are around 300 photographs from this source.



Pictures from the Piggott School - the laying of the foundation stone in 1939 (upper left), pupils building an astronomical telescope in 1951 (upper right), the girl's hockey team in about 1956 (below left), and a rural studies class of the late 1940s (below right).



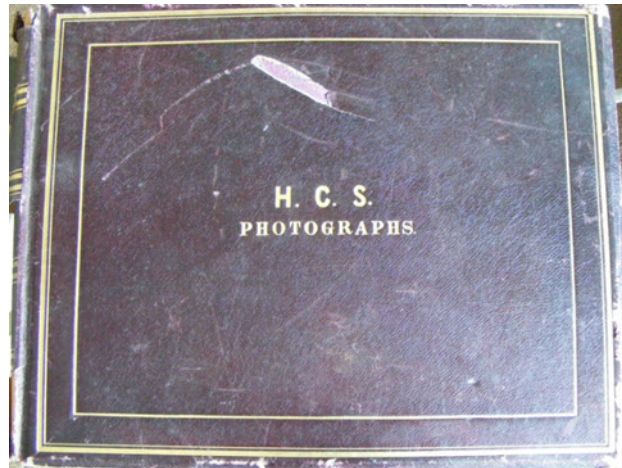
In due course, the Society was offered the postcard collection assembled by Derek Bird and his mother, Ruth. This comprised about 450 original items. The ferry at the St George and Dragon was long established - this particular card is undated, but is from the early 20th century. The collection has been put into a dedicated archival quality album - preserving the same sequence that the Bird family had used for them.



The story of the next major collection of pictures takes us back 12 years, to the Society AGM in 2009.

Two Society members (who have since left the area) asked at the end of the meeting if "we might be interested in some old pictures of the village?" There were 3 albums, with initials on, which might match details in the census, as well as two loose prints to show the kind of things they had. One of those showed the High Street - but this was relatively early, as the Woodclyffe Hall (opened in 1900) was not yet there. Subsequent examination of the albums showed that there were views from beyond the local area, as well as

those of Wargrave, Henley, and surrounding villages One was captioned "Queen Emma's Palace, as drawn by my mother" That was pulled down in 1827. There were also two taken inside a private house. This was the clue to the original owner of the albums, as the setting is still very similar. These were the personal albums of Harriette Cooke Smith, Wargrave's principal benefactress of the 19th and 20th centuries. Some of the images could be dated to the early 1870s – obviously the collection had been built up over a period, as one of the interior shots includes one of the albums on the table! The Society was very lucky to have been offered these. They had been seen by a friend of the members, son who recognised the word Wargrave, and so thought they 'might be of interest' - just before they were about to go into the Northampton refuse destructor.



The cover of one of the albums (top), one of the first prints seen, of Wargrave High Street (left upper), Church Street, with the bakery in the distance (right upper, the drawing of Queen Emma's Palace' (lower left), and the house interior - with album on the round table (lower right).



Although the archive has these large collections, many other items have come from a wide variety of donors - each in their own way interesting, and often help 'tell the story' with items from other sources. An example of that is this view from the late Bill Wyatt. The Wyatt family had run the St George and Dragon for the second half of the 19th century, and also set up a boatyard there, and this picture is taken from an upstairs window of the ferry and assorted boats.



The collection includes a lot of things other than photographs. That includes long runs of the Parish Magazine, first published in April 1861, and also a complete set of the Wargrave News. There are 'artefacts' as well as 'archives' - including part of the B17 Flying Fortress that crashed at Wargrave in November 1943, which was retrieved from the River Thames in 2010. Other items relate to various village businesses. – receipts, trading accounts and various other records that help record life in the village in time past.

There are thousands of items in the main catalogue. Some come from small donations, others from large collections - each in their own way recording the village in time past - be that hundreds of years ago or 'yesterday' - and often fitting with other items like a jigsaw puzzle to tell a 'bigger picture'. The Society is always interested to add items of village interest to its collection, to preserve them as a record of the people, buildings and events in the village.
