

# Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - December 2024

## Christmas Party - More From the Archives

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Wargrave Local History Society's December meeting was the Christmas Party, which began with members enjoying delicious home-made mince pies and mulled wine prepared by Wendy Smith.

During the evening, the society's secretary showed some "More From the Archives". This time, instead of photographs and documents, they were examples of 3-dimensional objects in the society's collection.

One of the oldest objects in the collection is this copper plate which measures 5" x 3¼". The wording on it is 'back to front', as it was made for printing advertisements for Emma Wyatt. She ran the Wargrave wharf, alongside the river behind the St George & Dragon. The plate tells that the business was established in 1845 and as Emma died in 1888, that suggests that the printing plate dates from the Victorian era.



At the end of the Victorian era, in December 1900, the Woodclyffe Hall was opened for the use of villagers. Provided by Harriette Cooke Smith, as the first of her benefactions for the village, it had its own set of crockery, each piece having the Woodclyffe Hall name in blue on it. The saucer (*below left*) is 5¾" in diameter, whilst the plate (*below right*) is 6½" across. Although the society does not have a matching cup, there are 4 dishes in a similar style, 3" deep, with St Mary's Wargrave in red lettering on them in the collection.



The next items all relate to an event that happened just before the First World War, although the first of them is much older than that. It is 'just' a piece of old oak (*below*) measuring s 2¼” square, and about 19½” long.



As is well known, the church was the subject of an arson attack, the fire being discovered early on the morning of 1st June 1914. This piece of oak was recovered from the wreckage below the tower by Cecil Crocker, the foreman carpenter for Waldens, the builders from Henley, when the church was rebuilt. As the tower was built in 1635, the oak probably dates from that period, although as the church had some major work carried out in 1849, it could be of a later date.



The church tower funnelled the flames up to where the bells hung, and in the intense heat they melted. The bell-metal was collected up, and cast into the medallions 2¾” in diameter (*left*). They were presented to the team of bell ringers at the time, each one having the initials of the recipient as part of the casting. This one belonged to George Bayliss, who worked at the lime kiln in the chalk pit.



The foreman of the tower at the time was William Fuller, and in the archives are 2 of these medallions cast with his initials, WF, on them. These medallions are plain on the back, but as not all of the salvaged metal was needed to cast the personalised medals, the rest was mixed with other metal (hence the different colour). They did not have any letters on the face side, but the back (*right*) carried the words 'Wargrave Church Bells 1914' and were sold as a way to raise funds towards the church rebuilding.

The society collection includes items associated with many businesses that once existed in Wargrave - such as the sign indicating that the butcher's shop was "Licensed to deal in poultry and game", or an advertising paper bag from one of the village grocery shops. There were local family run dairies in the village, and examples of the glass bottles that they used - with shops opposite each other in the High Street, and as well as 2 different styles of the standard 1 pint bottle (one with a wider neck), there are examples of a 2 pint bottle, and also the special 1/3 pint glass bottles, used for the milk distributed to children at school - most likely drunk using a paper straw. A different type of local business was the Wargrave Laundry, and as well as the laundry box used to collect and deliver clothes, there were special bags to contain items like shirts - some printed red, others blue. A little more unusual was the woven straw bag (*right*) which was marked for the fishmonger's shop run by Tony Shaw. This was originally on the west side of the road, but in the early 1960s he moved to occupy the ground floor of what had been a pair of cottages on the other side, and had the actress Diana Dors to perform the opening ceremony. The bag is 16” x 13”.



Sadly, there is now no butcher, dairy, laundry or fishmonger in Wargrave.

Some of the items that were shown would have been familiar to villagers - from a "County Library" sign that was fixed to the outside wall of the building where it was (and still is) located, the woven badge that was part of the uniform of pupils at the Robert Piggott School, or items related to the erstwhile Women's Section of the Royal British Legion. The longest item in the selection - being about 3ft 6in tall - is a garden fork, but it is no ordinary garden fork, (*right*) however, as it is not to the standard design. It belonged to George Bird, who had an artificial arm. At the end of the arm, there was a gloved hand, and George modified the garden fork to have a spigot so that it would "plug in" instead of the hand.



Several items dated from World War 2, including a tin of tubes of "anti-gas No 2 ointment" - intended to treat anyone affected by a gas attack, a piece of the wreckage from an American bomber that crashed locally, or a tin helmet marked FG (for Fire Guard), used by those who's task was to deal with incendiary devices. Food production during the war was a vital task that involved civilians - promoted by the "Dig for Victory" campaign. In Wargrave, a Village Produce Association was formed, and this box (*above*) contains the canning machine that they used. Villagers would take their produce - notably fruit - to be canned, so it could be preserved for use out of season. The box is about 17½" x 10½" x 7¼".



Not everything in the society collection is 'old' - as even items from the 21st century have a story to tell as part of village history, such as the commemorative tokens given to all the village children for Queen Elizabeth II's golden jubilee in 2002.

Lastly, one of the most recent additions is familiarly shaped lamp, (*left*) with a label on the top saying STARBOARD. However, the colour of a boat's starboard lamp is green - but this lamp has a blue glass! The reason is that WW2 blackout regulations strictly limited the light that could be emitted, so to help villagers identify the police station a standard boat lamp was modified by Val Wyatt at the boatyard to have a blue glass, and be electrically lit.

This is just a selection of the items the society has - some small, some large, some old, some relatively new - all with a 'Wargrave connection'.