

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - September 1999

### Down Memory Lane - Wargrave Residents Reminisce

Wargrave Local History Society met in September for a *Down Memory Lane*, as part of the Village Festival. Long-time village residents Bunny Bailey, Rodney Bush, John Fryer, Lucy Jones, Min Preston, Dorothy Pring, Owen Vile, Joan Weatherlake and Bill Wyatt joined with Society members to reminisce about the people and events of the past in what proved to be a most fascinating evening.

The topics covered during the evening were wide ranging, but began with memories of special celebrations, such as the Coronations - including that of George VI in 1937 - and VE Day. Such events in Wargrave were usually marked by a Sports Day on the Recreation Ground, often organised by Cyril Sansom, Alf Beckford and Frank Pope, with an associated street party. In the evening, prizes - spoons donated by the Hannens - would be presented to the winners. Another sporting event that was held regularly before the war was a Cricket Week, at about the time of the Regatta, in which various village teams competed.

Another type of event recalled was a Food Produce Show. At an early stage this had been held at the Vicarage, where as well as the expected exhibits there would be a sideshow "bowling for the pig". Later, the show was held at the Recreation Ground, when Mr Rankin, the chemist, was the organiser. We were reminded that during the war he had overseen the canning of fruit in a room at the Woodclyffe Hostel, and also that the Americans, on hearing that Wargrave was affected by floods at that time, had sent special "flood rations" - eagerly accepted by residents, including some in School Lane who were above the water level !!

Mention of the chemist prompted the names of various village shops - Stringer (greengrocer), Burgis, later Budgen (grocery where Mr Cundall was manager), Briscoe (insurance agent), Batty (cycles), Messum (fishmonger), Charlie Lunn (tobacconist), W H Smith, Pither (cafe), Rose & Bennett (dairy), Richardson, O'Hara & Lee, and Jennings (all butchers) etc. W H Smith had been on the west side of the road, but later moved to a larger shop on the east, and included a circulating library. Further along was Sansom's drapery shop, with the Post Office behind. Ladies of the village would buy wool from Cyril, and once the garment was knitted, add a price ticket for sale in the shop. And, if you were not sure if you liked a garment in the shop, Cyril would tell you to "take it home to try". Cyril's wife was extremely hygiene conscious, and a strong smell of Dettol was associated with this shop by many.

"Cabby" Brown, who operated from Brown's Corner (Willow Lane), would meet the trains at Wargrave Station, and taught many local people to drive. The station before the war was staffed by 3 porters and a stationmaster. The porter would hold open the door for a regular passenger, such as Mr Vickerman, and the stationmaster would make the train wait until he was there.

The telephone exchange was housed in the High Street, above W H Smiths (on the west side). The operator knew much of village life, so that if someone rang for Dr John McCrea, they would advise that "he's not at home tonight, he's having dinner with whoever". Dr John was renowned for having a very shaky hand, particularly when giving an injection, but it seemed to steady once the needle went in, whilst if called to a home visit for a child would likely pick up a pillow on the way out and throw it at the child! But, he was "always on duty", never said "no", and much preferred his pregnant patients to have home delivery where he could attend to them. Another person recalled was Rufus Isaacs, the AA man - who had no idea how to make an engine go, and whose main job was to stand by the AA box and salute passing members.

Schools, ferries, boatyards, local builders, farms, the chalk pit rifle range, and war-time evacuees were just some of the other topics covered in this evening of memories.

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