

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - April 2001

Berkshire Beyond the Obvious

The Wargrave Local History Society welcomed Trevor Ottlewski to give an audio visual presentation of *Berkshire Beyond The Obvious* for their April meeting.

He began with several examples in Windsor. The Market Cross House, for example, leans at an angle away from all the surrounding buildings, its timber frame allowing for settlement in a way a more modern structure could not, whilst above the doorway of a nearby building is a copy of the 1648 warrant for the execution of King Charles I. An unusual feature to be seen against the kerb on the hill outside the Castle is a series of metal bars - provided for carriages to rest against when waiting for their passengers., and further down, in Thames Street a blue plaque commemorates the burning at the stake of 3 people in 1543 because of their faith.

Trevor next showed a number of wells and pumps - including examples at Finchampstead, Hampstead Norris, Sonning , and - locally, Rebekah's Well at Crazies Hill, which remained in use until the 1950s. One Finchampstead example is recorded in the Saxon Chronicles in 1098 as having 'blood from the earth' - and was later blessed by St Oswald in the 16th Century.

Finchampstead Ridges was the next place to feature, from which great distances could be seen until the trees grew. Not far away is another area of trees - the Wellingtonia Avenue of trees of that species, provided in 1863 by John Walter of Bearwood; many of the trees are now over 100ft high. A much older thoroughfare in the area is the Devil's Highway, running from Roman Silchester to London across Bagshot Heath.

A more recent 'curiosity' is to be found at Coleshill, and now in the care of the National Trust. This was the secret site for training the Resistance Movement in World War II, and includes an underground hidden base below the woods. Designed as a temporary hideaway, it is one of very few known to survive. Also in the northern part of the old Berkshire is the barn at Great Coxwell. It was built in the 14th century, to store produce grown on lands belonging to Beaulieu Abbey, and has walls and roof made of Cotswold stone, with an oak aisled frame. Measuring 144 ft x 38 ft, it is large to be 'beyond the obvious', but its location means that it is not well known.

Memorials formed the next group of items to be shown. From the remains of a bomb damaged window at St Laurence's in Reading, and the wooden memorial there to the GWR railwayman killed on the station by a whirlwind in 1840, to the elaborate panels leading to the Kedermister Library, and the library itself, in Langley Marish church. The library dates from the 1630s, and the books from 1483. Most are theological volumes, but a particularly fine illuminated book is a Phamacopolium, with 'recipes' for many cures for assorted ailments. Other memorials are the neolithic long barrows, such as Wayland Smithy, the bronze age round barrows, or the mid 14th century wooden effigy of Agnes de Neville to be found in Barkham Church. One useful one for the family historian is to be found at All Saints in Wokingham - the Beaver Monument having

some 4000 letters, and giving the names of some 61 people. A more recent memorial is the War Memorial at Leckhampstead, around which the posts are of cannon shells, whilst the minute and hour markers are small shells, and the hands are made of old bayonets. A less elaborate memorial to war dead is to be found in Carpenter's Wood, near Burchett's Green, commemorating the loss of a fully laden Halifax bomber in 1944 - all but one of its crew died.

Trevor showed us many other fascinating unusual items, from the near (Conway's Bridge on the Henley road) to the far - a gibbet near Inkpen.
