

Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - August 2024

Local History Walk around Woodley

Wargrave Local History Society does not normally have a meeting in August, but this year a group of members were able to have a historic walk around Woodley. The guide was Ann Smith, who had told us of the History of Woodley at our February meeting. She had been the local studies specialist at Reading Library, and the editor of *A History of Woodley*, so was able to give the walkers a special insight into the various sites that were passed during the walk.



Starting by the relatively new Oakwood Centre (*above, left*), the first building of interest was only a short distance along Headley Road. Lone Pine Cottage (*above, right*) is a Grade 2 listed building dating from the 18th century, and had been the home of the local wheelwright and undertaker, although now-a-days a physiotherapist occupies the building.

A short distance beyond, and the party turned into Reading Road, and thence into Farriers Close. This, not surprisingly, was the site of the local forge. Although not formally listed, the cottage (*below, left*) has the date 1785 inscribed into one of the beams, so is again at least of 18th century origin, whilst the former forge building in its grounds (*below, right*), now used as a music room, still retains many of the original features. The house on the opposite side of Farriers Close appears to have originally been a pair of cottages, as in an old photograph taken in about 1900 one side of the building has a thatch roof, whilst the other looks to be tiled.



Further along Reading Road, on the opposite side, stands what Ann called 'one of Woodley's hidden treasures'. Bulmershe Manor was a classic "E" shaped 16th century manor house, but much of it was demolished, so that only a square portion of it remains. It is a listed building, but is hidden from view by the trees and bushes along the frontage. The gateposts (*right*) are surmounted by a pair of stone pineapples - which are also listed in their own right. Next door is Olden Oak, a 17th century listed house.



The group then walked back along Reading Road, to the area of Woodley's shopping centre, passing a house where recently a war-time air raid shelter was discovered in the garden.

The shopping precinct at Crockhamwell Road was developed in stages during the 1960s and 1970s, The ancient thatched Chequers public house was replaced by a modern one as part of the redevelopment, which also entailed the removal of several council houses. The present parades were not the first shops to be built here, however. Particularly remembered was Maxwell's - a traditional style of hardware store, which dated from the 1940s. Various supermarkets appeared over time, such as Home and Colonial and Iceland, with Waitrose store on the west side of the road later replaced by the present much larger one opposite. The group also noticed with some surprise that this area still had a bank - which was open (it had previously had branches of all 4 of the major banks).

Continuing down Crockhamwell Road, the old Bulmershe Estate had occupied the land on the west side. It had had 2 large lakes, but the old North Lake had been filled in for housing development in the 1950s, although the South Lake still exists. Even in the first half of the 20th century, rural areas, as Woodley then was, had problems with water supply and sewage disposal. Many homes, therefore, had their own water supply. The old Crockham Well, which gave its name to the road, was at the house now called Rose Cottage, although the well itself is now capped.

Further along the group passed another row of old cottages, before turning into Fosters Lane. This is known to have existed as a lane before 1818, when the Tully family ran a dairy there, whilst the dairy was being run by the Chapman family at the time of the 1911 census (*below, left*).



On the right-hand side, as the walkers headed eastwards, the house called Springfield had been occupied by Miss Philpin, described as 'rich and eccentric'. The area was still semi-rural in the 1950s and 1960s, and Miss Philpin ran a donkey sanctuary there (and others elsewhere). The feature in the bungalow garden (*right*) recalls its past use.

When she died in 1974, she had a total of 204 donkeys, which were left to a donkey sanctuary in Devon, near Sidmouth.



On the same side of the road between here and Loddon Bridge Road had stood the Fosters Care Home, run by the local council - it has since been replaced by Fosters Independent Living on the same site.

In Loddon Bridge Road, just across the road from Fosters Lane, stands what is probably Woodley's first place of worship (the area having been in Sonning Parish until late Victorian times). It had been provided by the congregation of St Mary's church in Castle Street, Reading, and was an independent Congregational Chapel (*right*). Later it became part of the United Reform Church. It remained in use for church services until 1982, since when which the building has been used for office.

From there, the route took the group back to what used to be called Martin's Corner, and more recently the 'Just Tiles' roundabout (although that business has now closed), and a return along Headley Road to Woodford Park.

At the entrance now stand a pair of memorial gates (*below, left*) with the dates 1918 and 2018 on them marking the centenary of the end of World War 1. The design incorporates poppies, and the path alongside leads to the war memorial, alongside which now stand a series of 6 panels about local servicemen who died in the conflict (*below, right*).



It was then a short walk back to the starting point - where many of the walkers found that a drink from the cafe there was very welcome on a rather warm afternoon, having discovered that there is much more to Woodley than its shopping precinct or trading estate!

All the photographs are by courtesy of David Williams

For more information about the society, visit our website at <https://www.wargravehistory.org.uk>