

Wargrave Local History Society

From the archives

This 'item from the archive' is one from the 21st century - "history" being about what has happened in the past, but not necessarily a 'very long time ago'.

The Rivers Thames and Loddon have always been liable to flood, especially at this time of year. In the 1930s, people who had had houseboats along the Loddon started to develop the adjacent plots of land - being aware of the way the river behaves, most were built with the lowest floor raised several feet above ground level. Being downstream of the confluence, (and no gates to control flow on the Loddon), the part of the Thames flowing past Wargrave is also at risk in times of heavy rainfall. Although most of Wargrave is built higher than the flood plain, many of the houses in Willow Lane are also built on a raised level, so the flood waters remain below the floor of the living areas.

One of the major floods occurred in 1947, and a report in the archive shows that the water was 5ft deep then, and water reaching the gas pipes and electricity cables meant that areas of the village close to the river were without heat and light. It can take many days for the water to drain away - for example the water rose to be 2ft 4in in the November 1954 flooding, and - the river was still swollen on Christmas Day.

Despite the best efforts of the Environment Agency, however, flooding still happens in the lower lying areas from time to time, as this aerial photograph from February 2014 shows. The camera is facing south, the long relatively straight line parallel to the right hand edge being the Henley to Twyford railway branch line. Whilst on the left hand edge Highfield Park is about half way up the picture. Willow Lane is in the left foreground. The normal line of the River Thames is between the curved row of trees in the centre of the picture and the village - virtually all of the fields between the village and the railway being covered by flood water, as is almost all of the area downstream of the St George and Dragon around Willow Lane, whilst (not so clearly visible) Watermans Way and Loddon Drive were also affected at that time.

