

The Parish Pump

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When Toby began renovation in 2015 there was a lot to do. Water had got in during the years without a proper roof, and some of the main floor joists had rotted. The basement was very damp as concrete had been used outside and inside to “tank” it, but this left the brickwork very wet and crumbly. After consulting many experts he was advised to open up all the old vents and replaster inside with lime plaster which would allow it all to dry out. After three years of work with builders in (over 100 in total), this is working and the basement is now dry. One interesting feature they discovered was a system of gutters in the basement, which allowed rainwater harvested from the roof to be moved around the house. A modern conservatory installed in the 1980s has been removed from the end of the house and steps reinstated returning it to its original plan. A well was discovered very close to the front door which has been dated by experts as from the 1650s, so must have been part of an earlier vicarage.

Throughout the restoration Toby has been in close contact with English Heritage who are very happy with the work he is doing. Future plans are to replace the top storey and raise the roof again, but keep the existing timber beams which have been sawn from a single tree. Plans have been drawn up and approved, but this may take a little time... Toby is in it for the long haul and sees this project as his life’s work.

Steve McArragher

HEDGEHOG NEWS

In March 2019 evidence, i.e. droppings, suggested that we had a hedgehog visiting our garden in Howland Road. This entailed a visit to Stanleys to buy proper hedgehog food and I started leaving a small amount in the same place each night. The night vision camera proved that only the hog was eating the food and not a cat or fox.

Over the next 3 years high winds damaged neighbours’ fences and these were replaced with new ones with no gaps in them. I realised that our hog had become trapped in just 3 or 4 gardens. At least this meant the he/she would not end up flattened on the road like our last one, so I continued feeding from the end of February to November each year. Imagine my surprise this April when I saw a second hog nosing around with our lodger! This proved that our lodger is male but I have no idea where the smaller female came from or how she found him. The camera was dusted off and pictures were taken of Mum and 2 babies, but I failed to get all 3 of them in the same frame. The nest is well hidden between our two sheds.



Having told a friend who lives diagonally to the rear of us in Stanley Road, she dug out a hollow under her back fence. Dad has decamped there and she now puts out a small amount of food each night in her feeding station constructed to keep her cat off it. Mum is recorded on our lawn around 9 p.m. each night and one baby visits at 3-4 a.m. Both have identifiable paler marking on their backs. The other baby is now with Dad in my friend’s garden. Both my friend and I have bought new hog houses as, technically, the youngsters have left home. The good news is that having put fresh straw in, two of my three hedgehog houses are now inhabited. Incidentally, above the hog nest is a roll of wire that we stuffed between the sheds some years ago. It hangs there and this year provided a safe place for the Robin to raise her brood. Of the five chicks hatched, four fledged.

Diane Fisher

Our last 2023 talk will be on **22nd November: “Tom Crean, unsung hero of Antarctic Exploration”** by Michael Smith. Tom ran away from home at 15, served on three expeditions to the Antarctic, spent longer on the ice than either Scott or Shackleton and outlived both men. But he could never speak about his exploits and took his remarkable story to the grave.

There is no meeting in December, so our next meeting will be the **AGM and Social Event on 24th January**. Then on **28th February Ray Morris** will give us an update on the activities of the **Marden Wildlife Group**. Finally on **27th March, Geoff Doel** will tell us about **“Kent Spring and Summer customs”**, just in time for us to practice them in the spring!.

All evening meetings are free and will be held in the Vestry Hall at 7.30 p.m. with a raffle followed by refreshments after the talk.

CHAIRMAN’S CHAT – Welcome Wollemi Pines!

You may have heard on the news about these special trees which were planted at Bedgbury in October. However the story goes back a lot further than that... The Wollemi pine has been dubbed the ‘dinosaur tree’ because fossil records show they were living 200 million years ago alongside the dinosaurs but were thought to have become extinct between 70 and 90 million years ago. Then in 1994, Australian explorer and botanist David Noble discovered a small group of them growing in a remote gorge in the Wollemi National Park in New South Wales, Australia. But with fewer than 100 Wollemi pines left in the wild, they are very vulnerable to threats from diseases and wildfires. They narrowly escaped being destroyed by the wildfires in 2019-2020, which burnt more than 10 million hectares of land in eastern Australia.

The first Wollemi pine at Bedgbury was actually planted in 2006 and is growing well. However recent advances in genetic techniques have allowed Australian plant science experts in Sydney Botanic Gardens to identify and breed more genetically diverse Wollemi pines. Now for the first time, these collections of young trees are being made available to selected botanic gardens with the right climatic conditions around the world. Bedgbury Pinetum was chosen as the centre for Europe, and over 170 trees were shipped to them a year ago. After a year in quarantine, six have now been planted in Bedgbury and others sent to 28 more gardens across the UK and Europe. Separate collections of trees have been sent direct from Sydney to five Australian botanic gardens and one in the USA.

This collection of trees will be carefully monitored as they grow, and these generically diverse trees will provide an insurance policy against their extinction in the wild. So let’s give a warm Kentish welcome to the genetically diverse Wollemi Pines!

Steve McArragher

HAMPTON-ON-SEA



L: worker's houses
R: remains of the pier



In September Geoff Turner told us about the lost village of **Hampton-on-Sea**, near Herne Bay, from 1864 to its complete drowning by 1921. Prior to 1864 Hampton was a tiny fishing hamlet west of Herne Bay, comprising a farmhouse, a pub and a few shacks occupied by fishing families. Predominant amongst these were the Mount and Quick families who supplemented their meagre income from fishing with smuggling. Thomas Mount, father to eleven children, all living in a 4 roomed shack, was sent to prison twice for his activities but after the second sentence apparently reformed and lived to the ripe old age of 99.

In 1864 the Herne Bay, Hampton and Reculver Oyster Fishing Company was incorporated with £10,000 capital. Despite local objection the Company got an Act of Parliament to cultivate oysters. This included 5 oyster ponds, 5 oyster yawls, a tramway and pier with storehouses and housing for the workers. The Company was successful at first, but failed in 1875 as the shallow freshwater ponds did not work very well, and there were disputes with the rival Whitstable Oyster Co. The land was bought by a Major Davis who closed everything down and transferred the assets to Faversham. The Act of Parliament was revoked.

In 1879 Thomas Kyffin Freeman, owner of the Herne Bay Argus, formed the Hampton-on-Sea Estate Association with £60,000 capital in £10 shares, but unfortunately only sold 398. His plan was to make a genteel recreational area with bandstand, reading rooms, tennis courts etc. He organised a sports day with free teas and amusements but too many people came so he ran out of tea. He planned a housing estate but died suddenly in 1880 and his ideas died with him.

Frederick Francis Ramuz, Mayor of Southend bought the land cheaply in 1886 with plans for a housing estate, a temperance hotel, church and shops. He also resurrected some of Freeman's recreational ideas. In 1888 he divided the "Grand Parade Estate" into 126 plots and all were sold in one and a half hours. In 1889 there was a second auction of 126 plots followed by a third in 1890. By this time roads had been built but very few of the developments actually materialised and even while building was going on sea erosion was taking the land. One of the reasons for the erosion was poor sea defences. A condition of sale included a clause of 5/- per year to be paid for sea defences. Very few actually paid and where attempts were made the work was poor, so none of them actually worked effectively to keep the water back. Over the next 30 years all the properties were abandoned as the land was reclaimed by the sea and by 1921 Hampton was officially declared drowned.

Edmond Reid was Hampton's most famous and probably most eccentric resident. He had been employed by the Metropolitan Police as head of the CID and had led the hunt for Jack the Ripper. He acquired the property in Hampton, No 4 Eddington Gardens, but renamed it Reid's

Ranch and painted castellations and cannons on the side. In his garden he set up a wooden kiosk that he named the "Hampton-on-Sea Hotel" and sold soft drinks and postcards picturing himself and the disappearing sights of the area. By 1915 he was the last remaining resident but finally abandoned the house in 1916, married in 1917, then died a few months later.

Today all that is left of Hampton-on-Sea is the remains of the pier, the Hampton Inn and the rocky arc of Hampton's coastal defence which is still visible at low tide. The coast was conserved in 1959 with a new sea defence and in the 1990s an information board depicting Reid was erected beside the pier. Erosion still continues although the defences are monitored and updated.

Barbara Dubois

THE OLD VICARAGE

On 25th October, Toby Spanier told us about the mysterious history and his ongoing renovation of the Old Vicarage. He and his family bought and moved into the vicarage in 2015, after having first renovated Church Cottage. One mystery is, why was it built so far from the church with a difficult route to get there? The answer is that it was built before the railway, so it is only just over quarter of a mile away in a direct line and well outside the village facing away from the road. He also said that the rooms in the house "impose themselves" on you, so it is difficult to use them for purposes other than they were originally designed for.



The first recorded Vicar of Marden was William Sturtington in 1283, and the first record of a Vicarage was in 1341. However the current Vicarage is Georgian and was built by Philip Le Geyt in 1817, taking only a year to build. He was the third son of a Canterbury Cleric so went into the Church and was given Marden parish. He had five sons and six daughters, so needed a large house - as originally built the house had 4 stories and 29 rooms!

These included a Parish Room which was intended to be a school for the poor of Marden, but was never used as such. The original estate was five acres, much larger than now, and included land on the other side of Maidstone Road where Rhodes Close is now.

Rev. Le Geyt died in 1847 and was succeeded by Julius Deedes who was vicar for 33 years until he died in the vicarage in 1879. In 1880 Rev William Benham took over but only stayed for 2 years before moving to a London parish. However he was responsible for renovating the vicarage, putting windows in the basement and extra fireplaces plus a chimney for the servants. Apparently the Rev and Mrs Benham slept on separate floors, each with their own servants.

Several other vicars lived there until 1965 when the new vicarage was built much closer to the church in the centre of the village. Then it was bought by the Sunnocks/Day families but the roof was in a very poor condition as much of the lead had been stolen. They therefore decided to remove the top storey and rebuild the roof, which was done in April 1967, just one month before the building was listed by English Heritage, which would have prevented them from doing it! In 1970 Tony and Pam Stevens bought the house and lived there until 2015. For part of that time they ran a Girls School there teaching home economics, fashion, music etc, essentially a finishing school for young ladies. It was also the home of Marden Theatre Group, run by Pam, with many open-air productions in the garden.