



Local History Collection

04 - Braywood Church

Autumn 2019

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In the last magazine I gave you some history of New Lodge and the Van De Weyer family. This family built Braywood Church at the top of the hill known as Sparboro (sometimes known as Sparbury) in 1866/67. For those who don't know of Sparboro, it is the footpath that is opposite the entrance to Braywood Cricket Club.

This footpath was originally bordered with hedgerows that were renowned for its abundance of fruits such as blackberries, sloes, crab apples, mushrooms and all varieties of wildlife and bird species.

Braywood Church was a large church with 5 bells and 280 seats and was funded by Mrs. Van De Weyer (as a gift to the villagers) on the death of her husband and dedicated to her late father, Joshua Bates. There was also a vicarage built next to the church and it still exists today as a private home. Many of the Van De Weyer family are buried in the churchyard.

The first vicar at Braywood Church was a Mr. Turner and blacksmith, Bert (Bertram) Simmonds' grandfather, was the first sexton and vergier. Bert's father took over these roles in 1914 when Bert's grandfather died. Bert took over from his father in 1922 at the age of 70.

Every Sunday 3 services were held at Braywood and on important occasions up to 350 people were squeezed into the pews. However, during and after WW2, the numbers could drop to as low as 30.

All employees of the Van De Weyers and their families were expected to attend church every Sunday and walk up the mile long drive, which is now private. The entrance can still be seen on the right hand side of Oakley Green Road, when heading away from Fifield village, between the pair of Lodges with white fences. All the villagers and children were expected to curtsy or bow as the Van De Weyers coach would pass them on the drive.

In 1871 Braywood Church became an Ecclesiastical Parish formed by Queen Victoria on August 22 out of the mother parishes of Bray, Winkfield, Fifield, Oakley Green and Cranbourne.

During WW2 the tower at Braywood Church was a lookout post for the Home Guard for Fire watch and parachutists. The church was also used for a Hammer Film for a scene in 'Curse of the Werewolf' when a local villager's 6 week old baby had a part.

However the church was in an isolated location and when the last Vicar resigned his incumbency in 1958 it was decided that the parish should be returned to its former fold. Villagers still held church services at All Saints Church which is now Braywood School Annexe but still a consecrated church. When the Union of Parishes took place in 1966 the Vicar of Bray reunited the two parishes and decided to demolish Braywood Church as it was considered a financial liability to church funds.

A notice was posted on Braywood Church's bolted door advising that all services were cancelled however it did remain a place of quiet prayer. The church was eventually demolished in the late 1960's. All the stained glass windows were smashed so that the lead could be sold, the bells were sold to a monastery in Devon and the walls of flint were so thick that dynamite was used to complete the demolition.

There are a few villagers who can remember services at Braywood Church and I invite them to send in a story or two about the church and what they can remember about services and vicars etc