

WESTCOTT LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

Westcott local history group was founded in 1998 to promote interest in the history of Westcott by convening group meetings with visiting speakers, and arranging walks and visits. Terry Wooden, one of our founders, was the driving force in building our archive of photographs, maps, documents, and registers relating to Westcott Parish. Our website westcotthistory.org.uk continues to be expanded through digitalisation of these records

Membership at present costs £6 per year per household, and £1 per lecture.

After more than 20 years activity, based in the Reading Room, lockdown has brought us to a halt, and given time to reflect on the best way forward. We have moved our archive and centre of activities to St John's, and would welcome comments from current and potential members on the following.

1. Is there enough support and interest to continue to organize our own lectures, or would it be a broader alternative to join with Dorking History Society for lectures, but continue to organize some of our own visits and local walks?
2. We are looking for help with digitalizing and editing our records, and would love to hear from anyone interested!
3. We are also looking for enthusiastic new committee members as well as ordinary members, and again, would love to hear from anyone interested!
4. We hope that our future path can be decided at our next AGM on Tuesday, September 14th.

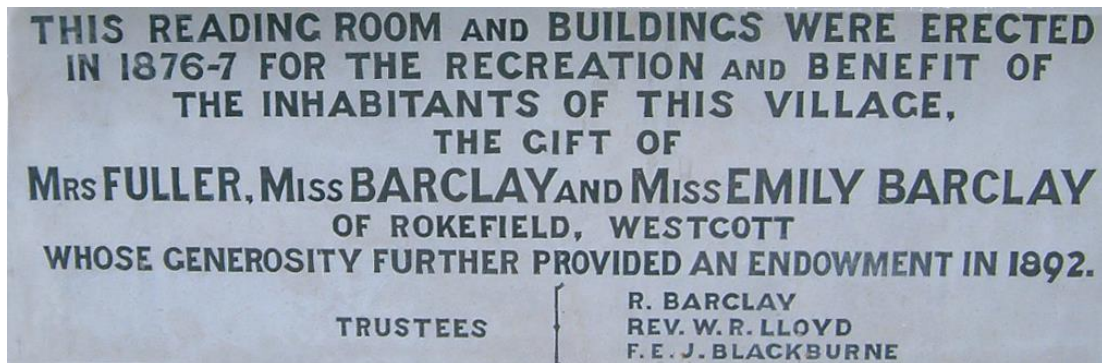
Comments please to Imogen Barker, Chair, 640654 or John Clachan, Secretary 887858 or to westcottlocalhistory@gmail.com

A subscriber on the Facebook Group, Westcott Memories, sought information recently on Rokefield and its use as a Blind Home so here is a history extract from our archives starting from about 1860 to the present day:-

An earlier Village Mag article (Apr 2019) told how the Rookery Estate in Westcott was bought in 1768 by Richard Fuller (1713-782) of the Banking family, from Daniel Malthus (1730-1800) who had developed it from being a 'fishing and game lodge' with the mill pond supplied with water by the Pippbrook. Richard Fuller's heirs continued to live at The Rookery for 126 years. When Richard Fuller's son Richard died in 1852 his widow Maria (nee Barclay but no relation to the other Westcott Barclay) inherited the estate but was obliged to vacate the family home to make way for her brother-in-law George Arthur Fuller and his large family. She did not wish to leave Westcott so the family built a new house called Rokefield on part of the estate.

The Fuller family estate included all the land west of the Westcott Street and in particular a messuage of 28 acres called Hole Hill farmed by a number of tenants including Mr Balchin. A part of this was 10 acres called Rokefield. In 1854 a Court Baron listed this part of the estate as inherited by Maria Fuller. The actual construction date of the new house is uncertain but between 1854 and the time of the 1871 census, where it is shown with a full complement of 8 domestic staff. Maria Fuller was originally Maria Barclay and she had two sisters Julia and Emily. All were born at Cadogan Place, Chelsea and their father was G.P. Barclay, a London merchant living at Charter House Square, Middx. Her mother Maria was born in Leatherhead.

They must have been an extremely well off family, as the 1881 census shows that Rokefield domestic staff numbered 10 people and the Rokefield laundry was in Westcott Street at the Old Barracks where William Ruffell, the coach man, lived. The Rokefield property included a paddock extending south to the Pippbrook stream. It had stabling for 6 horses, a coach house, a pleasure garden with two summer houses and an orangery with a vinery, greenhouses, and a gardener's cottage. There are memorial stones to the three sisters in Holy Trinity churchyard. Their most lasting memorial is the Westcott Reading Room and Draycote house where the caretaker lived. They also left an endowment for the future upkeep of the Reading Room for the benefit of the village. Maria Barclay/Fuller died on 6



Oct 1892 shortly after her sister Emily, who died on 7 July 1892 aged 74. The third sister died on 26 Feb 1898 aged 82. The plaque can still be seen in Draycote's garden.

The Rokefield property was auctioned in May 1898 on behalf of 15 individuals. The Dorking Advertiser reported that bidding rose to £6000 and was subsequently purchased by Lt. Colonel Jasper Davies, RE retired, and Henrietta his wife. The 1901 census records them in residence with five staff but a few months later the house was sold again, on 12 July 1901, to Charles Carey Druce of The Elms, Westcott for £8,500. They supported village charities



especially those with a musical interest and held many events for Westcott villagers in the Rokefield gardens. In the parish church there is a stained glass window, dedicated to St Cecilia, the patron Saint of music, which was installed as a memorial to Mrs Carey Druce. 1946 Rokefield was bought by the Jewish Blind Society, a charity founded in 1814 for the welfare of Jewish Blind people in London. It was extended to accommodate 64 blind

residents and a new hospital wing was built in 1950. The blind residents participated successfully in the Westcott Arts & Crafts Exhibitions. In 1990 the Jewish Blind Society amalgamated with the Jewish Welfare Board and the Rokefield property was sold to the Gardeners Royal Benevolent Society who required a temporary residence while their home in Henfield, Sussex was being rebuilt. Following this, much of the extensive grounds and agricultural area was sold and the remainder was developed by Rushmon Homes. The original house was retained but turned into apartments and several new houses were built in the grounds. Part of the paddock near the Pippbrook on the southern boundary was also sold and a few houses including the doctor's surgery were built thereon and known as the Riverbank.