

High Wych History 1 – The 1965 WI scrapbook.

Last month we told you of our plans to write and eventually publish a history of High Wych. Whilst those plans are still in their infancy we can tell you about a scrapbook from 1965 which recently we were allowed to look at.

The scrapbook was kept by members of the HW Women's Institute on the occasion of their golden jubilee. It provides a fascinating view on how we lived only 46 short years ago.

In 1965 the population of our Parish stood at 629 and there were 253 rated properties. There were two pubs, now there is only one. There were two shops. Likewise, there now is only one. The two largest houses, then as now, were the Manor of Groves, now a hotel and the Grange, originally the vicarage; in 1965, the home of the Wentworth Stanley family and still a private residence. Helmer & Dyer, the builders, Dixon's Garage and Andrew's Heating provided local employment. There was no street lighting. A proposal to install 15 lights was put forward but not decided upon as only four members of the Parish Council attended the relevant meeting.

The scrapbook tells of meetings of the WI of course, of the Young Wives Group and of other organisations. One such was the "Silver Lining Club", the flourishing over sixties organisation which has since folded and which organised monthly meetings, outings and holidays for its members. There are pictures and reports of weddings and births, of fayres organised by the school and the scouts of the harvest supper. On the "dark side" burglaries at the Manor of Groves and at Crumps Farm are mentioned.

Most impressively in 1965 High Wych did once again win the best kept village of Hertfordshire competition. Our village scored 100 points, the highest possible number of marks.

On the facing page you can see some pictures from the scrapbook. Clockwise from top left : Arnold the painter takes a break from decorating the Memorial Hall, Cover of Scrapbook, Children in the school playground, Mrs. Bird (school cleaner) with Mr. Beale the caretaker, Cubs and Akela, the village green, the pink cottages and finally Gladys Wood in her guides uniform.

Leafing through the scrapbook makes one feel more than a little bit nostalgic, sad even at the loss of community spirit and togetherness. Nowadays it seems we are but another commuter village for people who work elsewhere and whose social life has little to do with our immediate neighbours. Luckily we still have our church, our school, our one shop, our one pub and our memorial hall not to mention organisations such as the Garden Club and the WI.

Thanks to the Parish Council for letting us borrow the scrapbook, contents of which have now been completely scanned in. We also have been promised help from County Archives.

If anybody wants to help with this High Wych History Project, please get in touch. All original material such as photographs, charts, letters, will be scanned in and returned to owners. Or perhaps you just have a story to tell. You can reach us by e-mail (theo@vandebilt.co.uk) or by phone at 01279 725468

