

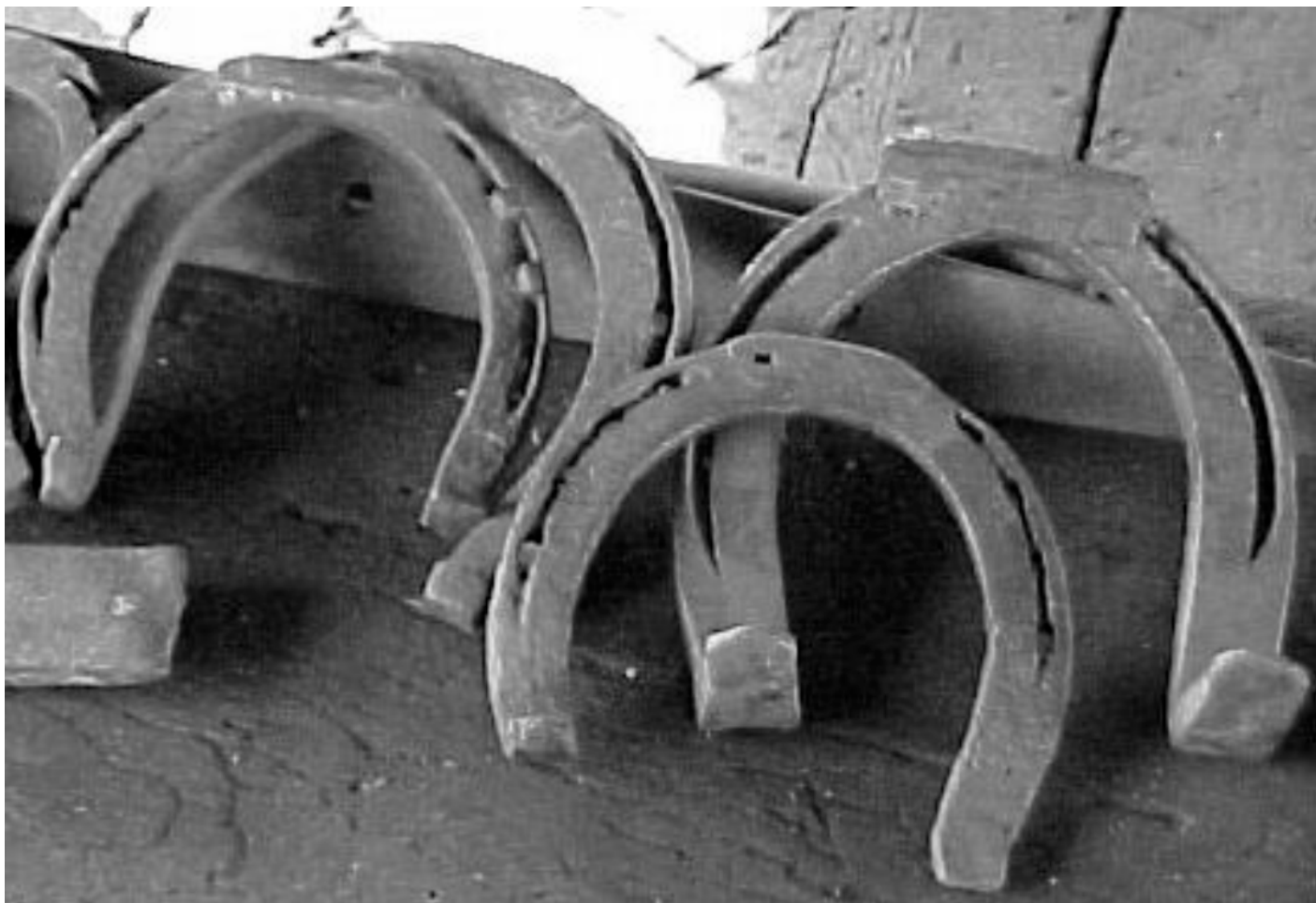


Local History Collection

2 - Fifield, Braywood and Oakley Green

Spring 2019

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Recently I was invited by the Year 4 teacher at Braywood School to talk to the students about the local history of Fifield. Local History is now part of the school curriculum.

I didn't feel that I have lived here long enough to be as qualified as some local residents to present enough historical facts about Fifield, so I spoke to a number of residents of Fifield, Braywood and Oakley Green who have lived here for between 60-75 years.

I then extracted historical facts from their conversations, previous historical notes and anecdotes of yesteryear to put together enough information for an afternoon talk and then an afternoon walk of the area.

Braywood School will be revisiting local history annually and therefore invite any local resident of Fifield, Braywood and Oakley Green (or further afield for those ex-residents) to submit their ideas, anecdotes or even corrections to Alison or myself to add to the story so far!

I started the talk by showing the students a map of the area in the early 1800's when the main features were a Smithy across the road from the School, Fifield House, farms, pubs

and houses in Coningsby Lane. As most of the students did not know what a Smithy was, we discussed why it was such an important part of the village, as the only transport would have been horse and cart.

A number of locals remembered the last village Smithy; Bertram William Simmonds R.S.S.(Registered Shoeing Smith) known as Bert. His smithy was tucked behind the pub; The Prince of Wales, which is now the private home called Finnegans. Bert was also the Braywood Church Sexton from 1922. His Grandfather William Greenaway had built the smithy in the early

1800's, it was a single storey open barn type brick building with a slate roof. It had two large wooden stable type doors and entry was at the side of the Prince of Wales Pub.

Bert worked in the smithy since he was a boy and shod his first horse when he was just 12 years old. He served in WW1 in France in the field Artillery as a Corporal Shoeing Smith. After the war he came home and re-opened the smithy. He joined the Home Guard during WW2 and shod all the Home Guard horses which were stabled in Windsor. He also became the blacksmith for Royal Ascot race days, gravedigger for the churchyard opposite(he once fell in a newly dug grave and had to be rescued).

One of the local residents told me that one of their school trips was to spend half a day at the smithy and the students were allowed to work the bellows. Bert always had his pint of beer and a pie at lunchtime at the Prince of Wales, in fact he loved his beer so much that it stopped him from getting married as the young lady he was going out with, asked him to give up the beer. In those days Bert could buy a pint of beer for 2d, cigarettes were five a penny and if you were very broke your lunch could be sourced from the local fields!

Bert died in the late 1960's and the forge was demolished by the brewery to make a larger car park for the pub.

I will be visiting a different aspect of local history for the next magazine.