

Sarratt Local History Society Meeting, 23 March 'Stocker's Lake' by Brian Morgan

On a late summer's evening as the birds fly in to roost above the water, or in the first, icy light of winter when ghostly shadows of water fowl can just be seen like ink marks on a Japanese painting, it is difficult to believe that Stockers lake, with it's numerous small islands, has not been there since the landscape of the region was first formed, long before Man came on the scene. Yet as our speaker, Brian Morgan, gradually revealed, there was absolutely no lake or pool on this spot till after the Second World War!

Brian and his wife bought Stocker's House, close to the Canal and Lake, in the late 1960's when he came to work at Mount Vernon as a young doctor. The house had apparently been built for £200 in 1861 as a Tax Collecting cottage for the Corporation of the City of London, in relation to the carriage of coal (the then



equivalent of our 'oil') on the Canal. After a fascinating account of his research into the history of Stocker's House, Stocker's Farm and the Grand Union Canal we were told how, as late as 1920, the recently formed Rickmansworth Canal Company bought the farmland adjoining the Canal to extract the valuable gravel below. This was loaded into barges and pulled by powerful traction engines along the canal. And guess what the gravel was used for: to build the first Wembley Stadium, completed in just 300 days at the cost of £3/4million!

By 1947, with gravel extraction completed, the nearby Waterworks bought the sight to protect the aquifer from which their water supply was drawn. Then in the 1980's it was acquired by the Herts and Middlesex Wildfowl Trust and is now under the everyday care of the Friends of Stocker's Lake. The unsightly gravel pit has become a 'birdy' paradise for both birds and bird lovers and far from an eyesore Stocker's is now a place of tranquil beauty. The herons are so pleased with it they have created the largest heronry in Hertfordshire. The fish may be less enthusiastic.

Angela Colman

The next Sarratt Local Hist. Soc. Meeting will be: Hew Motion on 'A History of Latimer and Flaunden' 11 May, 7.30 for 8pm at Sarratt School