

## Sarratt Local History Society The Gilliat Family of Chorleywood



The final talk of the 2017 calendar of the Sarratt Local History Society was held on Tuesday 23 November in the village hall. We were delighted to welcome Ian Foster, a lifelong resident of the Chorleywood, and a keen and published researcher on our chosen the subject matter: the Gilliat family.

Ian recalled that much as the philanthropic Clutterbucks of Goldingtons had shaped our village from the late 19th Century, John Saunders Gilliat would come to sculpt the history of Chorleywood. Purchasing the Cedars in 1861, he redeveloped this draughty 18th Century seat of the Finch family into a French chateau with no fewer than 15 bedrooms, servant's quarters and its own custom dance floor. With the house, he inherited the title of Lord of the Manor of Rickmansworth and Chorleywood, from which he would influence the fledging local cricket and golf clubs, as he sought to make use of the new Met Line extension built through the area. Indeed, it

is even known that an unofficial platform was granted for his own personal use as he had originally permitted the new railway to be built through his land. However these changes did not always please local residents, with the incumbent vicar in one instance retaliating against the new influx of anti-social behaviour of travelling sporting types in the local pubs by hammering an advertisement for the upcoming Sunday service on the 18th green!

Evidently, John did not always see eye to eye with his neighbours, but his benevolence or one might better say his personal wealth accrued from banking was plain for all to see (he would become Chairman of the Bank of England from 1883 to 1885). Having founded Heronsgate Church in 1865, and a new vicarage for Chorleywood for the incumbent James Aitken in 1869, he ensured that the crumbling Christ Church was rebuilt and a spire added by 1875. Professor Helen Fry at this point joined Ian

to provide a delightful account of a meal at the Cedars during John's tenure. Despite only having a foot of space at the dining table, each diner could expect to use at least 24 pieces of silverware each! In later life, John Saunders Gilliat served as MP for Clapham between 1892-1900, and although only speaking 14 times in parliament, he championed the need for pensions for Army Officers who had served in the Empire. This fleeting political career perhaps compelled him to further support the newly established parish council until his death in 1912. The Cedars sadly did not have the same charm to his executors though, being quickly sold several times before being presented to the National Blind Institute in 1917 for use as a school.

After a three-decade absence, the Gilliat family returned to Chorleywood in the form of another John, as parson

in 1948. His own popularity is more substantiated however, as reports of 400 villagers attending his morning service and a further 200 his evensong were not uncommon. Much like the first John, this John was a keen cricketer, who was even known to conduct Saturday weddings whilst wearing his whites under his surplice!

Such was the humorous conclusion to Ian's thoroughly enjoyable and insightful talk, leaving us only to once more extend our warmest gratitude to him for his time, and to Lady Joanna Staughton for providing the formal vote of thanks on the night. We would like to send all our members Season's Greetings, wish them all a prosperous new year, and very much look forward to seeing everyone at our AGM on **Tuesday 23 January**, from 7:30 in the Village Hall.

**Gregory Edmund**

