

# Bracknell U3A Local History Group Project 2023

## Places of religious worship.

Compiled by group member Ian Wood.

### **All Saints Church** London Road, Ascot SL5 8DQ



Local history of All Saints Church and surrounding environs:

#### **Ascot:**

Ascot was the centre of an important Bronze Age cemetery consisting of a number of round barrows called Bowledge Hill Barrows. These have almost all been flattened and built upon over time. Only one survives, bizarrely in the middle of the Heatherwood Hospital complex. (Owing to the new development at Heatherwood Hospital it cannot be confirmed by the author if this is still true) An old story tells how they were the home of the mythical Side-hill Winder. This bovine creature had two legs shorter than the others, so it could only live on the side of hills or burial mounds. If you wanted to catch one, you just had to chase it onto level ground where it would fall over!!

The name Ascot is Anglo-Saxon and derives from East-Cote meaning the Eastern Cottage, probably a reference to being east of the royal estate at Easthampstead.

Ascot has always been the western portion of Sunninghill parish (now called Sunninghill and Ascot) and, for most of its history, largely consisted of dangerous heathland frequented by highwaymen.

John Walsh of Warfield Park is recorded as having shot such a 'villain of the road' whilst crossing Ascot Heath and thought nothing more of it than shooting crows.

Queen Anne liked nothing better than to hunt in Windsor Forest. It was in the early 18th century that she discovered for herself this open heathland which she thought an ideal place, not five miles from Windsor Castle, for "horses to gallop at full stretch". She founded the racecourse there in 1711 when the first meet competed for Her Majesty's Plate (worth 100 guineas). The seven runners were sturdy English hunters which had to hold up through three heats, each four miles long. The popularity of Ascot Races declined in later years and, from 1739, an army contingent took to camping on the heath

for training purposes and marched to the Battle of Culloden from there seven years later. On their return, they were enlisted in the construction of the Virginia Water.

The races were revived by the Duke of Cumberland in the 1760s. He was Ranger of Windsor Forest, resided at Cumberland Lodge and had his own stud at Cranbourne. His nephew, King George III, was also a great patron and, in the 1790s, set up the first Royal Grandstand (which became known as the Royal Enclosure in 1845). In 1813, this common land was lost to royal hands in the Windsor Forest Enclosure Act. As a result of its popularity, however, the racecourse was made a permanent feature of the landscape for all the public to enjoy.

**All Saints Church** is located adjacent to two large institutions: Ascot race course and Heatherwood Hospital.

The hospital has its origins in a Victorian country residence known as “Heatherfield” built in 1876, possibly for the Farrar family (whose motto 'Ferre va Ferme' appears over the front door). It was in the ownership of the Ponsonby family between 1881 and 1891, when the Hon. Ashley Ponsonby, a justice of the peace and cousin of Sir Henry Ponsonby, Equerry to Queen Victoria, and his family had their country seat there.

By 1900 the estate was known as Heatherwood and had been acquired by Sir Thomas Lucas, Bt., the son of Thomas Lucas, one of the founders of Lucas Brothers, the builders. The estate was offered for sale at auction by Messers Chancellor and Sons in 1906, but initially failed to find a purchaser. The house and estate were eventually acquired by the United Services Fund (possibly in 1919 when the estate was again offered for sale at auction but more likely in 1920 when it was sold by private treaty by Hamptons).

The United Services Fund converted the building into a hospital for the children of ex-servicemen from the First World War. Patients were admitted from 1922 and the new hospital was officially opened by the Duke of Connaught in May 1923. The new facility specialised in the treatment of children suffering from tuberculosis and orthopaedic diseases. The hospital joined the National Health Service in 1948 and new accident and emergency, out-patient, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy facilities were opened by the Princess Royal in 1961. A new maternity department opened in 1972 and a new mental health and elderly health unit was opened by Princess Anne in 1988.

Following cut-backs, the birth unit closed in September 2011 and the minor injuries unit closed in January 2014.

A new hospital building with six operating theatres, 48 inpatient beds and facilities for 22 day cases, was constructed on a site close to the Ascot Stables and completed in April 2022. The former hospital is, at the time of writing this, being demolished, with a new housing development being built on the site.

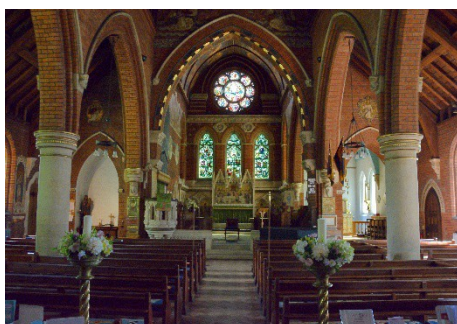


The church was designed by Mr T H Rushforth and built by a local builder, Joseph Norris in 1863

The need for a local church was a result of the race course being built in the reign of Queen Anne in 1711. The inaugural race at the Ascot racecourse, known as ‘Her Majesty’s Plate’, took place on Saturday 11 August 1711.

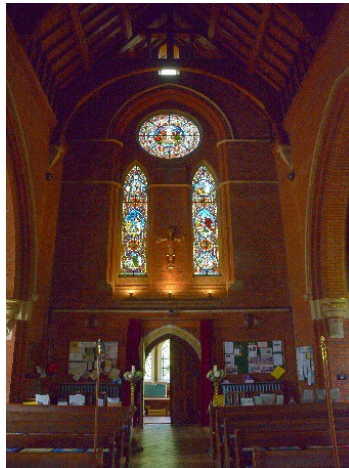
houses were built to accommodate horse

Over the years the population of Ascot increased beyond the existing local woodsmen and kennel workers. This was to accommodate grooms and other racecourse workers. Large houses were built to accommodate horse owners and race goers, while on the north side of Ascot smaller houses were built for the domestic servants. The population of Ascot grew again after the arrival of the South Western Railways in 1856.



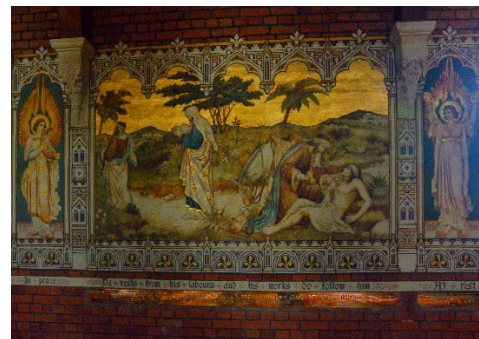
The churches of St-Peter’s at Cranbourne and St Michael’s Sunninghill were both a carriage ride distance away. The vicar of Cranbourne, Rev Connyham Ellis built a room

opposite the Royal Kennels in North Ascot to be used as a church on Sundays and a school on other days. With an ever-growing congregation, a building committee was set up in 1863 to look at the feasibility of building a new church on Crown land next to the existing Royal Hotel. (residential housing, Grand Regency Heights, now occupies the site). Queen Victoria donated £100 and £2,000, mainly by public subscription, was raised. Building work began soon after using mainly local red brick with Portland stone pillars. The building today remains close to the original design.



A west porch was added in 1870 and the north aisle in 1890. Various memorials have been added to both the inside and out over the years.

Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, son of William Wilberforce consecrated the church, with many local dignitaries in the congregation, on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1864.



Bayne and Butler were commissioned, in 1874, by the Rector Revd Kerr-Pearse to produce murals in the sanctuary. Later the chancel roof and arch were painted and, later still, the paintings in the north and south aisle were added. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, following much fund-raising, these out-standing paintings were restored to their original glory.

**Roll of Rectors** (from plaque inside the church):

- 1864 B.W. Kerr-Pearse M.A.
- 1900 W.F. Latrobe-Bateman M.A.
- 1917 L.C. Green-Wilkinson M.A.
- 1921 E.A. Steer M.A.
- 1925 H.L.L. Arnould M.A.
- 1933 H.A. Walton M.A.
- 1946 R.M. Gibson M.A.
- 1949 Graham Buston M.A.
- 1955 G.P. Wilkins M.A.
- 1962 R.D. Grange-Bennet T.D.

1967 F.C.T. Lancaster  
1982 C. Hewetson. M.A  
1991 P.Le S.V. Nash-Williams M.A.  
2001 Anthony P. Lury B.A.  
2008 D.D. Hannah B.A PhD.

Today (September 2023), All Saints is a vibrant church in the family of the Church of England, worshipping in the Catholic tradition. The congregation come from a wide geographical area and broad backgrounds. The church is served by, at the time of writing, the Rev. Dr. Darrell D. Hannah, who has been in post since 2008.

**Credits:**

All Saints church website.

David Nash Ford.

Wikipedia