

## **Wordsmith John Owen speaks to Headley Voluntary care**

John Owen Smith (call him Jo) was the guest speaker at the Headley Voluntary Care Autumn meeting on 10 October, and he attracted a near full house for his talk about Headley, its pathways and byways.

Jo was full of surprises and lots of humour. For example, right at the beginning, he began his tour of the Headley boundary at Passfield common...and the marker was a gate, on its own and attached to nothing... except a heap of mud ; but it was fascinating to know that that was the very spot where Passfield became Headley and vice versa.

Here are just a few more gems of information from his talk:

Ludshott Common, apart for a little bit near the main road, is in Bramshott Parish, not Headley.

Grayshott Hall is in Headley Parish.....the original structure dates from 1882; Tennyson lived there before the current building was established.

Waggoners Wells was dedicated to Robert Hunter (of National Trust fame) in 1919 There are not just three interconnected lakes; there are other ponds, 'smaller but pretty' according to Jo.

At the top of Stoney Bottom, there is a marker stone with the initials H S and F. The first two are Hampshire and Surrey, of course, but what other parish shares this junction? Answer? Frensham. What is it doing there? It is almost as if Frensham has sneaked up behind us!

John Nokes of Blue Peter fame lived at Barford, and the official footpath runs through his garden!

The parish is full of mills, of all types and sizes The best known is Headley Mill, belonging to the Ellis family ; it is no longer in working order, but Jo and no doubt the whole audience would like to see it restored to a heritage site

The Frensham Great Pond was established, not to enhance the beauty of the area, not for sailors, but by the Bishop of Winchester who wanted a steady flow of fresh fish for his supper! The Frensham Pond Hotel used to be.....the White Horse Inn. The Hampshire/ Surrey boundary runs across the water of the Pond, following the path of the old river bed which was the original boundary.

The nearby river Slea is elsewhere referred on signposts and marker stones as the river Seal. Clearly dyslexia is not a recent affliction.

The council dump in Lindford used to be a pond and a local beauty spot!

Grayshott used to be a part of Headley, but declared UDI in 1902. We would never have allowed such appalling so-called traffic calming constructions if they had stayed with us\*

All Saints church used to have a spire, but a fire in 1836 destroyed it and a replacement was never built. A throw-away line From Jo...the congregation escaped through the East window! How about that for detail!

When seeing old pictures of the church, Jo has a foolproof method of assessing its age; the amount of ivy visible! Once it was covered from head to toe!

The stores at the corner of Headley Fields and the High Street was run by Mr Rogers, and named after him But when he had to leave his beloved shop, he was so depressed that he shot himself. The road by the side of the stores used to be called Rogers Lane after the famous retailer, but the local authority changed the name to Headley Fields feeling that it was bad form to name a lane after a suicide!

Headley Park is the biggest house in Headley parish, and used to be a school for a while.

Headley Grange used to be a workhouse!

And so Jo went on. The audience were fascinated and would have stayed for much longer But he had to rush off to the village hall to take part in the Headley Theatre Club's dress rehearsal for Fawlty Towers. He is playing three parts, apparently, but this does not faze him one bit. After all, he is a wordsmith, actor, local historian, biographer, musician..... and an excellent speaker!

Peter Marsh  
Headley Voluntary Care