



# Wolvercote Commoners' NEWSLETTER March 2020

## Port Meadow – more than just history



Many of us may already know some of the history of Port Meadow – the Saxon dwellings, the escape of King Charles during the Civil War and so on. However, not so many may know just how important it was during the First World War. Users of Facebook may have seen a recent post by Peter Smith which outlined just what it was like to have been on the Meadow at that time. So, for those who may not subscribe to Facebook we thought it was worth reproducing the article here, including a suggested walk to work out what was there at the time.

### Port Meadow WWI Aerodrome — a local walk

The vertical aerial photograph was taken in June 1918. It shows Lower Wolvercote and part of Upper Wolvercote to include St Peters Church and the Plough pub.

Why not walk the area shown and see the locations of aviation related features, and buildings in the local community used by the personnel based at the aerodrome. Also included are some pre-WWI aviation points of interest while on route! Don't forget to look at the new World War I memorial in the former Bathing Place, to the 17 WWI fatalities. The information board nearby gives you lots of information about the aviation history.

- 1. The access** Start at Godstow Rd public car park facing out you should be able to see a faint outline of Aerodrome Rd. This was built for the RFC and was about 300m long.
- 2. The hangars.** About 300m out you will find a muddy circular depression roughly in line with the flat bridge to your left. Either side of this were the hangars shown on the photo, the large metal Rigging Shed immediately to your right at this point, was used to repair aeroplanes damaged in crashes.
- 3. The firing butts.** Turn right (west) and head towards the Thames. Roughly opposite St Edwards boat house were firing butts were used to adjust machine gun sights. Aeroplane tails would be raised up so the guns fire into an earth bank at the Thames end of the butts.
- 4. The targets.** Turn left and head south for a few hundred metres. On the photo a target that looks like an aeroplane, made of chalk lumps. Turn left and head east towards the railway line. The little concrete hut (4a) on Shiplake Ditch is the only surviving remnant above ground and was a refuge for groundcrew laying out targets. You can see a white triangular target in the photo. Don't enter the hut as it is considered dangerous.
- 5. The civil aerodromes.** The 1911 and smaller 1912 aerodrome structures were understood to have been located within Hook Meadow, the triangular field surrounded by a ditch and hedges. This enabled the flimsy planes to be sheltered, and then wheeled out onto the Common or Meadow to fly.
- 6. The Messes.** The Trout was understood to be the Officers Mess in WWI. The other local pubs were used by Other Ranks competing with local civilians!
- 7. The mortuary.** The bodies of airmen killed in accidents were held for up to several days in St Peters Churchroom, behind the main church, pending an Inquest and removal for burial. Children also used that room for Sunday School!
- 8. The 1912 RFC crash.** A memorial is near Godstow Rd Toll Bridge, and another plaque on the rear wall inside St Peters Church in Upper Wolvercote (7). The Plough pub (8) was where the bodies were held (now the restaurant), pending the Inquest held directly above on the day after the crash.

## Commoners' Talk Keeping Bees in Wolvercote



With Jane Carey & Phillip Dove

Wednesday 25th March 7.30pm  
The White Hart Community Pub  
Garden Room

**Come and hear about the  
highs and lows of our  
beekeeping over the  
last 6 years**

## A date for your diary Commoner's Committee AGM

Village Hall 7.30 Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April

The Commoners' AGM is an opportunity to see what we've been up to during the year and what we may be doing during the next year. It's also a chance for you to join our committee. We are always looking for new blood so, if you feel you'd like to be involved in the future and welfare of Wolvercote, why not come and join us. (Anyone in the Wolvercote Parish is eligible, you can check the parish boundary at [www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/520](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/520))

**SPECIAL NOTE:** For those who may walk in the Wolvercote Community Orchard. It will be closed for the last 3 weeks of March while disabled access is installed.

If you would like this Newsletter emailed to you please email [medesign@ntlworld.com](mailto:medesign@ntlworld.com)

## Don't forget Village Work Mornings second Saturday of every month

Meet outside the Village Hall at 10am (bring garden gloves, wellies and any gardening tools you have). Children welcome

[www.wolvercotecommoners.co.uk](http://www.wolvercotecommoners.co.uk) – [wolvercote.commoners@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:wolvercote.commoners@yahoo.co.uk)

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