

Redlynch & District Local History Society

A Walk Aroud Nomansland by Stephen Ings

The society met at Nomansland in June for a walk around the village led by Stephen Ings.

We started at the Well of Sacrifice on the green which was dug to a depth of 60' by three men from Nomansland in 1922. The board inside lists those who died and served in The First World War including R.G. Livens. He was the son of Herbert Mann Livens, a Unitarian Minister who came to Nomansland in 1909 and wrote about the early days of the village.



Livens credits John Shergold with founding the settlement in the 1780's. Shergold had built a squatter hut in Black Lane in Redlynch but was evicted and moved to what is now Nomansland. He built a Clotten House, these were conical huts with a frame of poles covered with turf. In later years they were mainly used as temporary shelters by charcoal burners. His daughter Elizabeth was born there in 1784, Boundary Cottage is thought to be on the site of that first dwelling. In 1802 Parliamentary Commissioners could not establish the boundary between the Forest and the Bishop of Winchester's land and dismissed any action against the squatters – Nomansland therefore belonged to everyone. The early settlement was mostly in the area around North Lane, South Lane and the green. The green is in Hampshire and the houses are in Wiltshire.

We moved on down the green to the garage which was the site of the original Primitive Methodist Chapel in 1846. The first meetings took place outside or in a cottage kitchen and the travelling preacher from Southampton was hoping to "to set stars of hope shining in dark and troubled minds". As we walked back up towards the current Chapel we saw two of the remaining original cottages and Stephen told us about the building methods. The footings were flint, then clay mixed with cow dung and straw or heather for the walls. Some cottages were one story and some two with a thatched roof, sometimes the top part of the gable was just hurdles and not mud. The current Methodist Chapel was built in 1901 and does not have weekly services but is now a community meeting place.

We walked into North Lane to the Reading Room which was put up by Livens in 1910 in an attempt to "civilise Nomansland". There were games and periodicals available and there was to be no alcohol. A short time after it opened a notice appeared warning that anyone drinking, gambling or using obscene language would have their membership suspended, so Livens may not have been entirely successful in his aim. For many years this small wooden building was the only public building in the village.

In 1875 the school was built in School Lane on land donated by George Morrison of Hamptworth Lodge and Stephen told us about one headmaster who had a very strict regime with liberal use of the cane.

The evening concluded with refreshments at the Methodist Chapel which Stephen had very kindly arranged. We had a very interesting evening, learning not only about the buildings but also about some of the characters who had lived in the village – including Frank King who delivered the newspapers but had a side-line in neutering tom-cats!

P.S. Stephen's book "Shot for a White Faced Deer" has several references to Nomansland and on page 31 you will find a picture of the mud walled cottages with the hurdles in the apex of the gable.