

North Camp Walk

On Sunday 18 October 2009, about 15 members and prospective members joined Jo Gosney on a walk around South Farnborough and North Camp. We gathered at the gardens in front of the Old Town Hall (now Ferneberga House) opposite St Mark's Church, then moved along Reading Road to the junction of Farnborough Road to the site of an airship crash in 1911, on what was then Woodlands Cottage. We progressed along Osborne Road, and then into Cross Street to look at the twelve cottages in Alma Square, built around 1865. Continuing along Osborne Road, with its numerous Victorian houses, we looked at the recreation ground which was once a gravel pit, then walked along Parish Road, the original path to the pit, on to Farnborough Road and up to the Holiday Inn which was originally the Queens Hotel. Looking out from the path in front of the hotel we talked about the site of an ancient burial mound behind a memorial to an unknown soldier in the Boer War both of which are on the Queens Roundabout. Wavell School is on the site of the earlier barracks and squares of the North Camp and at one time back in the 1860s there was also a popular racecourse which attracted thousands of spectators. Memories of the old Polo grounds were also recalled.

Along Lynchford Road we passed Peel Court which replaced the old police station, looked at the Soldiers' Home which is now The Old School House, and we talked about the history of the numerous shops along the edge of the camp which used to be the main shopping area for miles around. Renamed public houses, the site of horsedrawn trams and the connection with the fairground families were all mentioned. The route continued along Peabody Road, into High Street, looking specifically at the ornamental 'bunch of grapes' tiles on a row of houses opposite St Mark's School, and into Camp Road where the variations in architecture make up an interesting street scene. From there we went into Queen's Road and completed the walk by looking at the old brewery cottages and the former Children's Home along Church Path which emerges onto Reading Road near to St Mark's Church.

Two hours of discussion and reminiscences gave an insight into the colourful history of an area which developed as a result of its proximity to a military encampment.