

Redlynch & District Local History Society

Strawberry Fields Forever?

by Dr Mary South

More than forty people gathered - for the first RLHS meeting in 18 months due to the Coronavirus pandemic - at the Morgan's Vale and Woodfalls Hall on September 7th, for a talk titled *Strawberry Fields Forever?* by Dr Mary South. The speaker, who spent most of her career at Hillier's, looked at the development and heyday of the Strawberry growing industry in Hampshire which developed in the late 19th century to supply soft fruit to the burgeoning urban markets. For weeks every summer horses and carts would queue at local stations, waiting for the 'strawberry special' trains to take their produce to London and elsewhere.



So lucrative was the 'Strawberry Coast' trade that a new station at Swanwick was built in 1888 to accommodate it, and other station platforms, such as those at Bursledon, Botley (pictured) and



Bishops Waltham, were lengthened to allow room for stacking the huge number of strawberry containers. Strawberry growers in Shirley often used liners as transport. The philanthropic Garnier family of Rookesbury Park, near Wickham Common, had around 25 houses built on the edge of their estate, with an allocation of four acres per dwelling on which to grow strawberries in order to giving locals a reasonable livelihood.

During WW2 the trade turned largely to the war effort and masses of strawberries were sent to WI's all over the country to turn into preserves, earning them the nickname of the 'Jam Busters'. The markets declined in the 1960s when cheap imports began to arrive. Today there are still many 'pick-your-own' sites in the south, continuing the traditional 'family activity' that strawberry growing always was.

Bob Inns, Secretary

September 12th 2021