



Stevington: The Village in Action

In the first article we described the Village and its setting. Within that setting there operates a lively community. Anyone who comes to live in the Village realises very soon that they have joined something unique, if not to Stevington then to the English 21st Century rural community. They find that the place ticks.

Why this is so is difficult to pinpoint. Nevertheless, the fact remains that within a population of under 800 the social activity is remarkable. Perhaps the most important organisation is the Parish Council headed by a tireless former schoolteacher, Doreen Pendlington. The Council is Trustee for the Village playing field and Social Centre which is managed by a Committee representing most organisations in the Village and the parishioners as a whole. Its chairman is Gary Thomas, a civil servant. The Social Centre has been the scene of many popular revues



and other events over the last 30 years. The two churches are an important focus though less so than a century ago. St Mary's dates back to Saxon times and we know the identity of the vicars from 1138.



The incumbent is Rev David Hunter. The bell tower was revived in 1990 when the tower was reinforced and the bells rehung. The current tower captain is



Rosemary Maclaine. The Baptist Chapel (founded 1655) is the third oldest in the County.

There are the two Village charitable trusts. The Barringer's Trust (Chairman, Albert Markham) administers the five 17th Century almshouses. While that trust is over 350 years old, the Historical Trust

(Chairman, Alan Edwards OBE) was founded only in 1999. Its purpose is to research and popularise the history of the Village. The Friends of the Trust (Chairman, Peter Conquest) organise a number of lectures each year.

Another long-standing institution is the Women's Institute (Chairman, Pam Rolls) which was founded in 1943. The Branch attracts a considerable membership and regularly entertains guest speakers.

A number of sporting clubs flourish in the Village, notably the Football Club recorded as active by 1901, the Carpet Bowls



Club, the Table Tennis Club and the Sailing Club (founded in 1954) situated in a glorious location at the Riverbank at Park End. The stretch of the River Great



Ouse in Stevington is as beautiful as any stretch of river in England and is very popular with fishermen. The Cricket Club was founded in 1882 and enjoys a mag-



nificent setting overlooking the village. There have been some losses over the last century, especially the Lawn Tennis Club and the Horticultural Society. In contrast, the Stevington (7.3 mile) Run (inspired by Charlie Homer) around the loop through Pavenham and Oakley each May remains very popular.



Like any other rural community Stevington has suffered since the Second World War. The School was closed in 1984 and the students are bussed to Oakley and Sharnbrook. The loss of an important Village institution is balanced by the greater resources available at larger schools. The last commercial Village shop closed in 1993 following two armed robberies, but the Village responded to the loss by founding the Community Shop in the Church Room. This is a much-valued, non-commercial venture.



The September Village Fair or Feast was last held on Burrige's Field in the late 1950s but has been replaced by other less traditional church and Village fetes, such as the Flower Festival. The Harvest Supper is always well-supported as is the Christmas carol service, which features

an excellent junior orchestra and senior choir, apparently spirited from nowhere. Another popular event is the Christingle service held in St Mary's church to raise funds for the Children's Society.



In 1939 about two dozen people worked on the land in Stevington. Inevitably the Village has become something of a dormitory village for those who work in Bedford, Milton Keynes, and indeed London.



Probably only three or four parishioners are still actively engaged in agriculture today. The only other "village jobs" are postmistress, post lady, Vicar and Pastor, and the publicans of the Royal George and the Red Lion.

Paradoxically, with the computer revolution more people are now working in the Village (from home) than 50 years ago. Perhaps this is an important factor in maintaining the strong sense of community. Whatever the reasons, the Village seems to contain within itself the seeds of constant renewal.



All the photographs used in this article were taken from the recent publication "Stevington in Pictures" which is available for £17.50 from The Stevington Historical Trust. Call Peter Hart on 01234 823586, or order online from: www.rogerdayphotography.com/publication.htm

