

Chapter 7 *Some People*

*Portraits here of Villagers long gone
Reflect the many trades and pastimes going on,
When people trudged laboriously to work
From dawn to dusk with little chance to shirk
But made their own amusements then as now do we.
Reader read on. Page after page you'll see
Astonishing diversity before your eyes unfold
From cot to grave, both very young and old.*

We have few photographs of Villagers for the period before the First World War. Two of the earliest are of Samuel and Jane Harker (nee Burton) [417 and 416]. Samuel was a lacemaker, originally from Crowland. He did not personally make lace but collected it from women throughout the Village and surrounding villages who made the lace at home. Their children, Mary Sophia and William Burton Harker, are buried at the Baptist Meeting. The Harkers lived at Yew Tree House on the corner of Silver Street and Park Road. This became one of the Village shops in the early part of the 20th Century. Another early photograph [422] shows Marion Field's step-grandfather, Mr Raban, a former owner of the Windmill.

Fortunately, Ray Cox has a unique collection of family photographs going back to his great-grandfather Thomas Cox [426] who kept the *Cock Inn* at West End, now a private house. Ray's maternal great-grandfather was William Bowyer [419]. His first wife was the redoubtable Rebecca Bowyer [423]. Ray's paternal grandfather was Oliver Cox, who kept the *Royal George* after it became a fully-fledged public house. He is seen here with his wife, Lily [420]. He was also a saddler and this photograph shows him working at his house in Church Road [425]. **Plate 421** shows him with his whole family. Ray's uncle was Rex Cox (see Chapter 5 282). His father, Don Cox, married Marjorie (Madge) Wildman of Felmersham seen in **Plate 428** (right) with her sister, Connie, and in **Plate 418** as a bridesmaid.

In the era of Oliver Cox the Village was much more self-sufficient than now. One can perhaps understand why we no longer have a saddler, but when so much riding goes on locally the loss of the smithy is a shame. One of the last

blacksmiths was Dick Ruffhead of Silver Street (see Chapter 3 137). Only two followed him, and the smithy in Church Road closed in the late 1960s. Until recently, the gap was filled by a peripatetic farrier, Michael ("Tubbs") Chisholm [472]. In the last three decades we have lost the Village School (1983), the Bakery in Silver Street and the adjoining shop (1971-3) as well as the corner shop at the Cross which closed in 1994 after two armed raids. George Strong and his late wife Phyllis ran the latter shop for many years. The last shopkeepers were Brian and Liz Stammers [462]. Both have been active in the Sailing Club for some time and Liz has also served on the Social Centre Committee. The gap left by the closure of the shop was filled in part by the initiative of Jacqui Ward, Sarah Bush and others who established the Community Shop which thrives in the Church Rooms [441]. It celebrated its tenth anniversary this year [442].

Fortunately, we still have a Post Office and **Plate 445** shows the postmistress, Tracey Bailey, with the regular post lady, Gill King [447], and her relief, Jean Blayney. Stan Walker supplied the Village with newspapers until 1985 [446]. He was head groundsman at the Bedford Modern School until 1982. He is seen in **Plate 444** with HM The Queen at the opening of the School's new buildings in 1973. He says she told him to look after the tree as she did not have green fingers. Stan's own garden is still a picture [457], but there is enough grass for two of him. The last milk delivery from the Village was in the late 1980s when the Homers called it a day.

While self-sufficiency may seem to be in decline, many essential services are still supplied locally. Charlie Finch plumbs and heats the Village (see Chapter 5 333). Mickey Garrett (aka "The Biddler"), a daytime refugee from Pavenham, is

progressively rebuilding the Village and is seen here [437] with his Clerk of Works, Bill Wills-Moren, and assistant bricklayer Nick Finch. Mick Stalley has repainted the Village and John Geerts (aka "Poisson"), captured here with a recent catch [474], supplies us with fresh fish; Magnus Lennie and his lads [473] keep our gardens tidy. Stephanie Field is a qualified homoeopath [476].

Robert Shaftoe's workshop in the old Primitive Methodist Chapel is always a source of interest. It is there that he builds and renovates organs and manufactures harpsichords and spinets [478]. David Litchfield [477] has his own coach business (see Chapter 5 295), and Litchy's coach has taken Villagers all over Britain and Europe on various jaunts and holidays, not to mention booze cruises to the Pas de Calais.

The Village is fortunate in its musicians and always has been. Philip Bond (see Chapter 5 324), Liz Cox (see Chapter 5 325), Joan Hart (see Chapter 5 322), Terry and Marion Hext [459], Dita Hollins (see Chapter 5 345) and Ann Warburton (see Chapter 6 395) have all taught locally, but the Village has had the benefit of their skills in many concerts and revues. A surprising number of Village children play an instrument and almost at the drop of a hat it seems possible to conjure up an orchestra or a choir.

The Hexts' elder son, Michael Hext [460], was BBC Young Musician of the Year in 1978. After college he joined the Covent Garden orchestra and his brother, David [461], joined the Halle orchestra as a percussionist.

Indeed, in Stevington people have never existed in a vacuum. It has long been a Village of clubs and associations. Inevitably they come and go. For example, the Flower Club [424], in which Mary Mackness was a leading light and honorary secretary, exists no more. It revived in the 1990s for a brief period as the Gardening Club through the efforts of Roger Disson and Bob Poulter. The apogee was a ten-minute slot on *Gardener's World*. A seed-buying cooperative still survives. The Stevington Investment Club, "Spike Island", was wound up this year after some exciting years of speculation under the chairmanship of Alan Proud [464]. The Youth

Club, despite much dedicated effort, closed in 2001.

On the other hand, the Stevington Brownies are a well-established group and have maintained a vital focus for Stevington's young ladies over the years. They are seen here in action in **Plates 432 and 433**. The longest serving Brown Owl was the late Janet Litchfield [435], but Jackie Gooding, who succeeded her, is set to equal her record [434]. The nursery school at the Manse under the leadership of Brigid Cox [429] is moulding the new generation and turning the girls, at least, into suitable candidates for the Brownies. The Summer School [431] which she also organises is always oversubscribed.

Other individuals make outstanding personal contributions on their own account. One of these is Pat Pickup who has edited the Village Magazine since 1987, latterly with the assistance of her husband, Ian [436]. We shall greatly miss the work of the Village genealogist, Helen Allen, who died last year (2003). She traced the genealogies of some 24 Stevington families and the Historical Trust has custody of her archive [458].

Other Villagers pursue interesting hobbies. That of Simon and Kathy Brown [448] at the Manor House is a major undertaking. They have created what is undoubtedly the finest garden ever seen in the Village and one that is part of the National Gardens Scheme [449-56]. Visitors regularly come from abroad to view it. Kathy is a qualified garden designer. The Jubilee celebrations in 2002 were held there in a splendid setting.

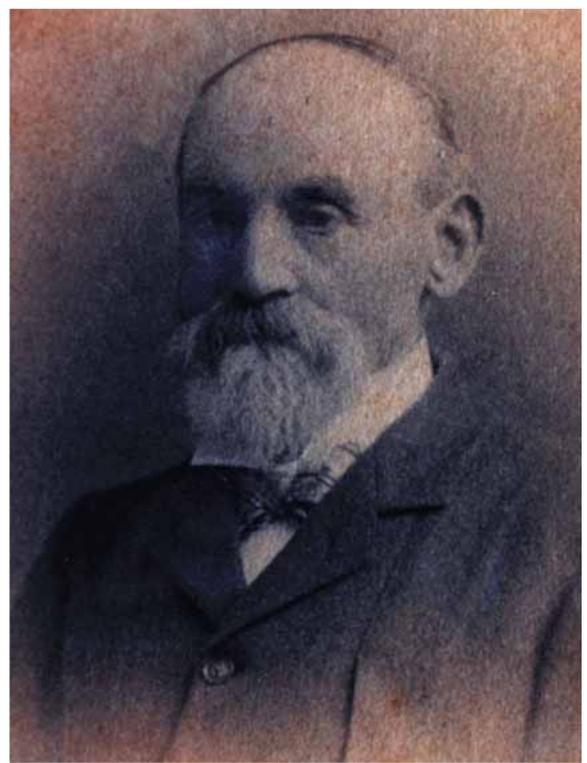
But they are not alone. For example, Aleks Murzyn flies a helicopter [469] and formerly was the world individual hovercraft champion, while Mary and Brian Webb build dolls' houses [471].

A rather different contribu-





416 Jane Harker b. 16 October 1834



417 Samuel Harker b. 3 January 1828



418 Madge Cox as a Bridesmaid



419 William Bowyer with Thomas Bolton



420 Oliver and Lily Cox



421 Oliver Cox and Family



422 Marion Field's Step-Grandfather, Mr Raban



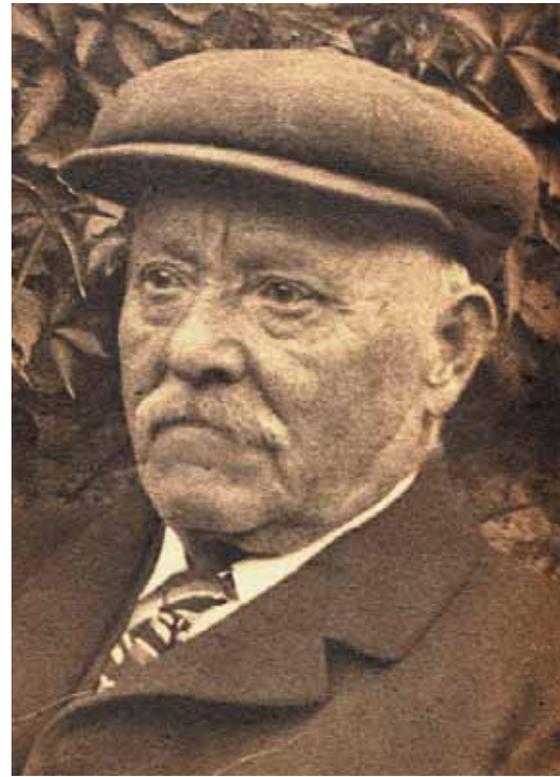
423 Rebecca Bowyer



424 The Flower Club



425 Oliver Cox as Saddler



426 Thomas Cox



427 William Hensman Robinson of Hart Farm with his Wife



428 Connie and Her Sister Madge



470 Marion Field at the Well



471 Mary and Brian Webb



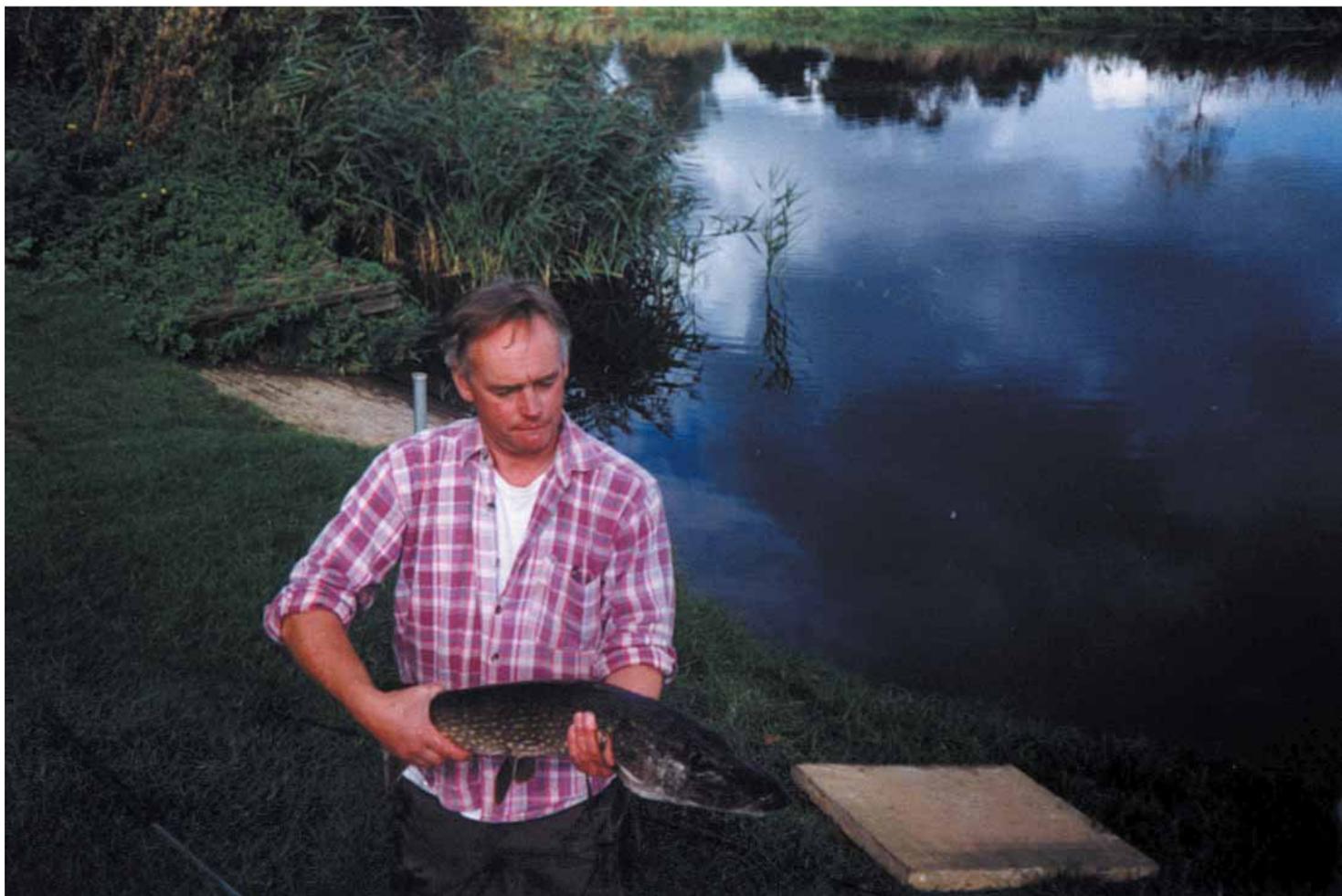
472 Michael ("Tubbs") Chisholm, the Farrier



473 Magnus Lennie and his Lads



474 John Geerts Angling for a Sale



475 Rob Puckett on Pike Drill









481 Promenade



482 Violet Warwick aged 100



483 Connor Cox aged 14 Days

Stevington, Goodnight!



Last Reader, Turn Out the Light!