

## Village Recorder's Report for Badwell Ash, Suffolk 2015

After the traumatic village events from December 2013 when our village school, in existence since 1970 closed (officially in July 2014), preceded by the playgroup closure in June 2013 looking forward to the 1914 Centenary celebrations of August 2014 bode well for the future. As this event went so well along with other village activities (the annual Armistice, Halloween, bonfire night, bingo nights & pub nights to name but a few) 2015 was set to be fair.

However, at the outset our church of St Mary's was then dealt a blow with the incumbent, Rev. Sam Long, stating in January that he would be retiring by the end of June. Simultaneously this coincided with a benefice change from 8 parishes (Badwell Ash, Walsham-Le-Willows, Finningham, Langham, Westhorpe, Great Ashfield, Hunston & Stowlangtoft) to 6 (Badwell Ash, Walsham, Finningham, Wattisfield ( from Hepworth), Langham & Westhorpe) which has resulted in much upheaval and for what result?

The village bad luck continued in January when our village shop which had survived in the same place in The Street, virtually opposite the White Horse pub, for c. 300 years and is now a well-used Londis offering a PO, fresh bread , a dry cleaning service and cash facility was burgled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time since December 2014. It seemed that 2015 was not going to be a good village year! In February the offenders were in court but bailed for a later trial. There were also other village burglaries during this month along with problems of speeding.

With the primary school children now becoming used to a bus or coach journey southwards to either Norton or northwards to Stanton the PC focussed on determining the future of the site of the redundant school which was earmarked as the site for two detached houses. This is complicated situation as St. Edmundsbury diocese was to decide the future of the site. In the interim the PC began to think about improving the village recreation field behind the school to make it more usable. As it adjoins historic water meadows there is a high tendency for flooding which is particularly an issue for the football pitch. A priority in the same area was the removal of the playground equipment on the former school land to the rear of the building also used by the community which was condemned as dangerous. A group of villagers put in a plea to save the memorial garden adjacent to the school building rather than it being allocated as part of the housing development but there has been no outcome here as yet.

From late February until early April the annual toad patrol along the Hunston Road took place. This has been existent for five years now and seems to be quite a success in helping toads on their travels to their breeding grounds. Local volunteers guide the toads across the road at various points having made the often too speedy motorist aware of the toads' annual plight. For we humans, as throughout Suffolk, a defibrillator was fitted to the Chip shop wall in case of emergency.

The Parish Council saw several Councillor changes this year especially with the retirements of Richard Pratt after 20 years as a member. Still a prominent member of the community Richard has followed in his parents' business footsteps as they used to own Norwich Ale Stores (now Norwich House) opposite St Mary's in the last century. He recently located his construction and engineering business from Badwell Ash to Walsham- Le -Willows. Stephen Rose seems to have taken Richard's place with the local family connection, in his case going back several centuries within our area. Together the Parish Council members helped to organise various events throughout the year. A village spring clean in April preceded the Easter egg afternoon tea and Easter egg hunt, the latter not being well attended but enjoyable none the less. In August a village picnic with rounders was organised but due to many competing events locally this was not a success either.

On Rev Long's retirement a retired incumbent, Mrs Pam Robson, a new arrival in Badwell Ash, offered to undertake church duties during the Interregnum. This 'freedom' spurred on a new Parochial Church Council to be formed with Stephen Rose taking the post of church warden. Enthused by a drive to protect the fabric of our Grade 1 listed church Stephen began his tenure by walking rather than cycling in the Suffolk Historic Churches Bike Ride in September between the benefice parishes. He raised nearly £1,300 for the fabric fund. Shortly afterwards in the same month Roy & Eileen Le Grice raised £671 at their ever popular Annual Quiz night for the church and Village Hall funds. Then October Harvest supper raised further funds for St. Mary's.

Funding for the Village Hall was ongoing with monthly bingo sessions boosted by a Curry night held in the pub in September, a well-attended jumble sale and the November Guy Fawkes night raising £970. A new Village Hall management committee was formed as a separate entity from the Parish Council to oversee and help the fund-raising for village hall improvements. The Hall was well supported during the year by various clubs – the Suffolk Young Farmers have introduced a new Youth club for 10-16 year-olds to add to the existing art classes, carpet bowls to name but a few.

In November the Armistice ceremony was unusual as three family members of one of the survivors of a crashed USAAF B17 bomber crew, based at Great Ashfield during WWII attended the church service. This was followed by a ceremony at our new war memorial which had been erected on the village green along with the new village sign during the WWI Centenary commemorations in 2014. A new plaque to the eight members of the crew who died in that crash was unveiled. They also visited the site of the airfield in Great Ashfield where their forebears flew from and, close by, the site on the borders of Badwell Ash and Hunston where eight of the nine members of the crew lost their lives on an icy January morning in 1944, shortly after take-off. An exhibition relating to the crew members and the crash site was displayed in the Village Hall followed by the Parish Council entertaining our American friends at the White Horse pub in the village. This was a very memorable event.

December brought the annual events which included Xmas wreath making, a childrens' Christmas party, the Christingle service and the Christmas Eve Carol Service with 140 people packing into the church. A new landlady and landlord had arrived in The White Horse pub in November and it was reinvigorated with the introduction of further themed nights, Christmas events and the reintroduction of homemade food. So the well subscribed steak nights and other new activities were beginning to herald a better end to the year. The Parish Council though were in emergency session following the resignation in November of their Chair Karl Hortt, after eleven years of service. They have endured a difficult year.

So life in Badwell Ash has been eventful. The population has been mobile with a dozen houses changing hands for yet higher prices. One of the previous manor houses, Shackerland Hall, was put up for sale in September and the old Vicarage, opposite the church, was eventually sold by the end of the year. By December 31<sup>st</sup> ten properties with varying prices remained unsold with eleven being sold. St Mary's recorded one christening and two marriages but no burials. However, the village landscape has changed little throughout the year apart from the unfortunate removal of various hedges along the Walsham road, on the eastern side – will we expect more housing development in 2016? Watch this space!

Pat Monk

Village Recorder

January 2016