

Sibford Scene

25 years old!

The Sibford Scene was started in March 1977 with the following lines

We all stir into action with the spring, and SIBFORD SCENE hopes to keep everyone in Burdrop, Ferris and the Gower up-to-date with all the many village activities. The paper will appear monthly so please let us know what your organisation is doing. We shall also be glad to receive brief letters, articles, news, ideas and small ads. Contributions should reach the editor or the Rector by the 20th of each month.

Production costs will be about £20 a year. We want to circulate Sibford Scene free so that it reaches every household so we invite donations from organisations or individuals who think the project worth supporting.

The Scene started with Mrs. Jennifer Austing as Editor. The first issue was a single sheet printed both sides with items covering Dr. Agnews return from a year as a Flying Doctor in Australia, the Youth Club, when the fees were 7p for students and 10p for those at work, a W.I. Theatre trip and a proposal to form a "Sibford Young Wives Group". Also included was...

Royal Silver Jubilee

After the public meeting in January, a small committee is now planning an exciting series of events for the Jubilee weekend (4th June - 8th June). Keep the dates free and watch these pages for details.

It did not take long to grow into a multi page production and some regular writers to join in. Gardening tips have appeared quite regularly by several authors, most notably Geoffrey Law who contributed for many years as 'Jardin'. In May '87 'Nature Notes' appeared for the first time and have done so ever since and many interesting one off articles have appeared. The Scene soon benefited from some of our village artists and hand painted headings and cover pictures have appeared regularly, many by Mollie Mulley and Sheila Walsh. There follows a selection of items from past issues which I hope will be of interest.

This report on the 1982 Open Village Weekend appeared in the September issue of the Scene. It must have been quite a weekend to organise!

Impressions of the Open Village Weekend

Friday Evening. Haven't got round to buying a ticket for the concert. Go up hopefully. Good, a seat in the back row of a Packed Church. A delightful programme, well performed, with special mention due to the accompanist and oboeist. Flowers beautiful despite the storms of the past week. How do the arrangers manage it?

Saturday Morning. Desperate attempt to get garden produce picked and presented in saleable condition between the showers. Take it to stall holder hopefully. Now for the village tour. The Barton lorry - full marks for family hard work and enterprise and value for money. Added pleasure - mother-in-law and uncle feature in the old photos. On to Pets Corner and the storm saw us coming! Shelter in the barn and listen to the helicopter still flying. Good that it's getting custom, even if not mine! The water rises; a drain is found and cleared and the flood subsides. Pavement flooded along Acre Ditch - children splashing joyfully through it. Up to Mrs Tanner's stall. Amazingly they seem to be dry and business is good. A couple kissing opposite the school by a sign saying 'Exhibition' and pointing at them. The lady who spotted this chuckling as she passed. Into the peace of the Meeting House. Transported to holiday places, but the stinging nettle by the literary Miss Baker sticks in the memory. On to the Garden Party. Thank goodness our offerings have sold. Cakes going at reduced prices, we are in luck and the weather is improving. Along to the old cars, through Barley Close where the gardens look lovely, then back by Sodens where everyone is welcome, despite wet feet and dripping clothes, to see the craftspeople at work. Into the Village School - Mr Mansfield looking up entries in the Log Book for an elderly villager, her delight at finding her name, Alice Walker's name in the 1895 entertainment programme (now Alice Green living at Adderbury House). And finally the evening sunshine in Mr Drings garden, all storms forgotten.

Sunday Morning. Cut sandwiches, make soup, leave food for those not attending the Open-air Service. Take chairs, rugs and food to the playing field. Weather looks a little undecided but the Rector assures us that he has had a word with the powers that be, and, of course, it stays fine. An excellent Brass Band, joyful hymn-singing and a prayer which I wish I could live by and keep before me. A very happy coming together which continues for the picnic lunch and through the afternoon. Oldest, Miss Nelder, and youngest, latest arrival at Little Thatch, present. An energetic game, not played for many years, rounds off the weekend with a feeling, of exhaustion but great pleasure - and I hope a lot of money was raised too.

A Parishioner.

The first Nature Notes
JOTTINGS FROM A NATURE LOVER'S DIARY
APRIL 1987

We have twice this year seen a fox taking an interest in our flock of lambing ewes., On each occasion the two fearsome looking Wiltshire Horn rams had stationed themselves between the flock and the fox and once, were walking towards it as if to see it off.

On March 29th I was surprised to find a dead bat, probably a pipistrelle, lying in the road. Might a cat have taken it when it emerged too early from hibernation?

Primroses are making a particularly good show this year and the few warm days before Easter brought out the first cowslips. On Good Friday I saw Brimstone, Peacock and Comma butterflies which had successfully overwintered. We shall soon see the Orange Tip, which is one of the first butterflies to emerge from its chrysalis.

Also on Good Friday I saw, what I think were, 6 Whimbrel flying west to east in a very determined way, doubtless on their way to their breeding grounds in Scandinavia or Russia.

It is nice to see corn-buntings back on our telephone wires, where they seem to sit for most of the summer. This morning, in the apple tree outside our bedroom window, there were four bullfinches all practising their religion. There was also a blue tit showing its strength by pulling shreds of bark from a dead twig and taking it to a new nest box that I only put up a fortnight ago. I could also hear that our blackcap had returned. I wonder whether it is the same pair that return each year.

A Poem For Leap Day (March 1984)

This poem was given to one of our older readers many years ago.

Excuse me, sir, 'tis Leap Year.

I'm writing just to ask you

If you want a careful wife.

I'll darn your sock so neatly,

Sew buttons on your shirt,

And keep your home quite tidy

And promise not to flirt.

And if you are not married

And feel to me inclined,

just take me to the altar.

And I'll be for ever thine.

In April 1986 strange goings on at the Meeting House were reported.

What - Sibford, Prime Minister?

“Whatever is going on?” everybody asked. “What are all these cables festooning the trees and crossing the roads?” There were people, equipment and cars everywhere. The Wykham Arms’ car park was full of BBC vehicles and its bars full of BBC personnel! The inside of the Meeting House looked more like a film set than a place of worship - full of scaffolding, flood lights, cameras, monitors and technicians galore - and so much coming and going.

It was all simply explained. Paul Eddington of ‘Yes Minister’ fame had been invited by the BBC to be Cliff Michelmore’s guest on the programme ‘Home on Sunday’ and, remembering his (happy?) days at Sibford Friends School and weekly visits to the Meeting House, he had asked that his choice of music be relayed from there.

By 10 a.m. on Wednesday 12th March the choir (from New College, Oxford) and musicians were installed and busy rehearsing. After lunch for about sixty at the Wykham Arms, the performance began and the cameras rolled - or whatever T.V. Cameras do, so that by 5 p.m. it was all over bar the clearing up.

Later in the spring, the cameramen will be returning to take some shots of the village, so please keep that litter down - or rather up! Then we must wait until June 22nd when the finished programme will be screened.

John Endersby.

There have been only four Editors of the Sibford Scene (with one or two early issues edited by the Rector and Frank Rollett) which shows a remarkable enthusiasm on their part, or a total inability to get rid of the job once started! At the end of 1985 Jenny Austing passed the job on to Barry Davies who continued in the job until late in 1992. Ray Henbrey then took over, having been working as assistant editor for some time, and continued to be the editor until his unfortunate illness. In 1996 Ray decided that he could no longer manage to do the job every month and suggested that the Scene should become bi-monthly. Adrian Lamb offered to edit the Scene every other month and Sibford Scene Extra was born in March 1997. This arrangement continued until Ray’s illness when I had to take over all the issues and decided that the Scene Extra should be ended. (We have only had one Treasurer!)

The first Sibford Scene Extra in March 1997 saw us congratulate Miss Kathleen Copley on her 100th birthday and a well timed article on the forthcoming lambing time.

A Farmer Writes.

There is no better sight in spring than ewes and their young lambs. I often take a few minutes just watch the mothers grazing, the lambs playing, darting back and forth, jumping, regularly running back to suckle. At this time of year I always think how wonderful sheep are.

I have to confess however, this sentiment does vary greatly during the whole season. The reason for this continually changing attitude is the constant battle that has to be fought against a sheep's instinctive nature.

From birth a sheep has two goals. Firstly, to escape from whatever confinement he or she was put in whether indoor pen, paddock or field (the saying 'grass is always greener over the fence' seems particularly relevant)

Secondly, To kill themselves. I have experience of many successful attempts in our own flock in recent years. These include drowning both in streams and troughs, hangings from bale strings, wire netting fences, twisted briars entangled in neck wool not to mention the many ailments which are available to contract. A particular speciality is to crowd around tall trees, telegraph poles or, even better, metal pylons when lightning is imminent.

If (Manchester United like) the double can be achieved, i.e. dying whilst in the wrong field, a place in ovine heaven is assured.

Feelings of exasperation, frustration, downright loathing through to extreme irritation occur regularly.

Questions, such as, 'who in their right minds keeps sheep? 'Why not plough up the grassland and plant wheat? (wheat never gets out!) Why bother? Is it all worth it?' frequently cross my mind. Deep down however I know that the pleasure gained in the next few weeks more than compensates for the past hassles endured and the inevitable troubles to come.

Anyone who has ever had anything to do with the keeping of sheep will recognise all the emotions and problems above and, no doubt, be able to add a few more besides.

The Scene Extra tried to find items to include beyond the scope of the Clubs and Societies events which make up the bulk of every issue and I pestered many friends to write. Many of the Village farmers contributed and we ran Mike Ethrington-Smith's diary of the course building for the Olympic three day event over the three years leading up to the event.

One of the more unusual articles from the Scene Extra came from my parents family archive.

Account of the great Snow Storm of January 18th to 19th 1881
written by Joshua Lamb a few days afterwards.

The severe weather which culminated in the great snow storm of January 18th to 19th having somewhat abated gives me an opportunity of recording some of the difficulties we have recently passed through.

It was after many sharp nights during which the thermometer seldom registered less than 28 degrees of frost (Fahrenheit) [-16°C] that on the morning of Tuesday January 18th we found the wind blowing strong from the North East with ten degrees of frost; the gale gradually increased in intensity until it blew a hurricane and the cold was almost unbearable to the strongest and most enduring, no one venturing out of doors except those of us who had livestock to attend to or for some other reason were compelled to do so.

About two o'clock in the morning the snow which had fallen a day or two previously and was perhaps two inches deep, began drifting and a clearance of all exposed places was soon made together with large quantities of dust from the ploughed fields which might be seen coming like a cloud towards you and ultimately lay many inches thick under all the hedgerows and in sheltered spots and in many places will require carting away when the snow has all melted. Great damage was done at this juncture to thatched buildings and ricks. About dinner time it commenced to snow and we were soon surrounded by the most terrific storm ever known by anyone now living in this neighbourhood. It came so thick and fast that it was impossible to see any distance in front of us drifting very much all the time. The snow blew into my face and neck and the warmth of the flesh partially melted it till it became one solid mass of ice and snow, my mouth, eyes and nose being the only parts visible when I reached home at night and at times they too were almost closed by it, great icicles formed even on my eyelashes and I found the effect of it for several days, my cheek swelling where one great cake of ice stuck all day.

We had got the turnip sheep in an exposed situation where hay racks and hurdles were blown (?) about like ninepins by the blast so we took them away into a meadow where, we found many of them snugly buried under the blow next morning. The storm continued through the night and all next day and closed about six in the evening having snowed continuously for about thirty hours.

All the roads which lay at right angles to the storm were liberally choked with snow and it took ten men a week to open them in our village, the drifts in many places being level with the hedges. A great number of lives have been lost in the snow, two strong men that I well knew were frozen to death, one of them being Henry Hosting(?) of Banbury who was out with a load of flour from Grimsbury Mill and was overpowered on his return near Deddington and took refuge in a hovel where his body was found eight days afterwards. The other was a wool buyer of Oxhill named Allitt who was returning from the Banbury Twelfth Fair and was frozen to death between Epwell and Shenington.

The week succeeding the storm was also very severe, the thermometer generally registering 20 degrees of frost (Fahrenheit) [-11°C] each night and on one occasion it went below zero. [-18°C]

From May 1985

Trees

Most of us in Sibford remember the Elm at Sibford cross roads. Hallowed by Sibford Old Scholars it eventually fell victim to Dutch elm disease despite strenuous efforts to save it. Many of us also remember with affection the remains of the far more ancient elm on the opposite side of the road, first adopted by the Old Scholars as their emblem in 1907. In an account taken from the O.S. Magazine of 1935 Joshua Lamb said that at one time a large branch reached out horizontally across the main road and "this was a favourite resort of the village boys who delighted in dropping missiles on the carriers cart when passing underneath".

In 1893, during a terrific snowstorm the main portion of the head was blown off and this, with the unsafe horizontal branch was sold to William Poulton for £4.13.6 to make into boards. Two hundred and fifty seven growth rings were counted showing that the tree must have been about three hundred years old. Joshua's uncle Septimus Harris sent a poem on its demise to the Banbury Guardian suggesting that soldiers in the Civil War might have passed it on the way to the battle of Edgehill.

Such trees give us great links with the past and are one of the most precious parts of our heritage. People in villages have long memories and a chat with one or two of the older residents will reveal many interesting details. Mr. Fred Lines remembers as a child planting an acorn near what is now the electricity substation in Temple Mill Lane. It is now a sizeable oak tree over 70 years old! Fred's father helped John Lamb plant many of the lovely old trees in "Oddies Field" and had to go round watering them in dry weather. It is sad that since 1947 this country has lost 30 - 50 % of its ancient woodland together with miles of hedgerow containing many both mature and young trees.

Each species of tree has its own population of insects which supply part of the vital food chain supporting other wildlife. Hedges too provide shelter and food and a habitat for so many of our wild flowers. So, when trees and hedges go birds and many other forms of wild life suffer. Fortunately we still have in Sibford many people committed to the care, protection and planting of trees. It is vitally important and we can never do too much.

I would plead that in villages and rural areas we should make a particular effort to plant trees and hedges which are sympathetic to the environment, particularly native forest and hedgerow species. Even now there may be someone in the village planning to fell a tree or uproot an old hedge, if so please reconsider the idea and ask yourself if it is really necessary. Villages are not suburbs but too many villages are fast coming to resemble them.

Joan Sheilds

This item on Housing appeared in March 1992. How many more have been built since?

Sibford Ferris Housing This Century.

From Dyers to Warmingtons and from Little London to Oddies, as children in the 1930's; we knew who lived in every house in the village, and very few changes took place. Many of the cottages were rented and some must have been bursting at the seams. Most houses known by the name of the person living there, apart from some of the larger houses and Little London, which appears to have had that name for many years.

In this century, Home Close was built before the first world war, on the site of an old barn and cottage, and between the wars, Beech Cottage, The Small House and Richmond House were built; but it was after the second war that the real expansion took place.

There have been 28 council houses and bungalows replacing 5 previous dwellings, 5 barn conversions and 31 other new dwellings. The Old School (Manor), the New School and the Boys and Girls houses are not included in this tally, although they do have accommodation for single and married staff, but the school bungalows up Back Lane and the houses in Hillfield are included. In two or three cases, 2 or more cottages have been made into one, and in one or two cases a house has been divided into two, but 64 new dwellings in the second half of the century, with only 4 in the first half, is quite impressive. Two cottages near the entrance to Mannings Close and two at Rymell's Corner (Hook Norton road corner) have gone altogether. Houses outside the immediate village, like Shortlands and Austins Ground have not been included.

There were about 44 dwellings occupied in my youth and Holly House was where the Doctor lived and was privately owned. This meant that the only access to the Hill was along the Back Lane and that was the way all building materials must have gone when it was built, as well as all the traffic for the next 20 years or so. Cows were regularly brought down the lane for milking in the buildings behind the Old House (now part of Lambs Croft).

With the increased changes in ownership and the greater number of houses, it is no wonder that our ageing brains have difficulty in keeping up with all the names (of houses and occupiers!)

Ina Lamb.

I hope you have enjoyed this short and fairly random trawl through the archives and will be looking forward to another 25 years of the

Sibford Scene.