

**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT EDITION - FRIDAY 5th APRIL 2002
TO ANNE BRAITHWAITE AT THE MILL, TEL. No: 831282; [e-mail:
Mill@auwoxon32.freemove.co.uk].**

One Swan or Two, Your Grace?

A New Year: a new title for me! No, I haven't been mentioned in the Queen's New Year's Honours List but nonetheless my title has changed: from Vicar to Rector! Not that anything has changed for the parishes of the Chase Benefice – or for me – just the recognition that one of the four parishes [Heythrop] traditionally had a Rector. When parishes join together the Incumbent taken on the title of the senior position: hence I and my successors have been upgraded from Vicar to Rector.

All this means for me is a change of heading on my letters. However, historically, this would have meant much more as the Rector of a parish had the rights to all tithes and Glebe income. A Vicar, on the other hand, was only paid a stipend by the Rector to look after the parish for him whilst he was away. According to Archbishop Cranmer's "*Dietary*", published in the 16th century, the rations at an official ecclesiastical luncheon should be as follows:

An archbishop - two swans or two capons; *A bishop* - one swan or one capon.

An archbishop is entitled to six blackbirds; *A bishop* is entitled to five blackbirds.

A dean is entitled to four blackbirds; *An archdeacon*, two.

An archbishop may have six snipe; *An archdeacon*, two.

The rabbit, lark, pheasant and partridge allowance is as follows: a canon residentiary is to have a swan only on Sundays; a rector of 16 marks is allowed only three blackbirds in a week. If a dean has four dishes during his first course he is not allowed custard or fritters.

I have no idea how this fare compared with the diet of most people in Cranmer's day, but it all looks rather exotic to me. The thought of eating three blackbirds a week isn't very pleasant especially for a member of the R.S.P.B.! I am glad that all such ecclesiastical conventions have been abolished.

I am also very glad to be your parish priest – whatever the ecclesiastical title attached to the job! It was a pleasure to meet so many of you at the carol services and I hope that this New Year will provide many more opportunities for meeting you again and getting to know you better. As to how you address me – as long as it is polite I don't mind! But my preference will always be Mark.

With all good wishes for a good and peaceful New Year.

Mark

**Note for your Diary - CHURCH FÊTE on The Green,
Saturday, 13th July at 2 p.m.**

Notice to all members of the Churches Electoral Roll

In accordance with the Church Representation Rules a new electoral roll is to be prepared in each parish in 2002. The Church Electoral Roll is your parish church's register of electors and is the list of those qualified to attend and to vote at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in the elections for the Parochial Church Council and the parish representatives on the Deanery Synod. In 2002 and every 6 years thereafter the electoral roll is renewed. In a year of renewal, no names are carried over from the old roll and everyone must apply for inclusion on the new roll

Under the Church Representation Rules any persons are entitled to have their names entered on the roll, if they: (a) are baptised and aged 16 or over; (b) have signed a form of application for enrolment; **and either** (c) are members of the Church of England or of any Church in communion with the Church of England being resident in the parish or (not being resident in the parish) having habitually attended public worship in the parish during the six months prior to the application for enrolment; **or** (d) are members in good standing of a Church (not in communion with the Church of England) which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity declaring themselves to be also members of the Church of England and having habitually attended public worship in the parish during the period of six months prior to enrolment.

Application forms for enrolment will be available from the back of Church from the beginning of February or from Jim Beveridge [Chestayne House, London Lane] and must be returned by 24th February.

If you have any questions please contact Mark Abrey on 01608 676572.

SERVICES AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

Full details of times of services in Ascott and the rest of the Chase Benefice can be found on the notice board in the Church porch and on the various boards around the village. Our normal pattern of worship is:

Sunday	Time	Service
1st	11.00 a.m.	Matins
	4.00 p.m.	Family Service
2nd	8.00 a.m.	Holy Communion
3rd	11.00 a.m.	Holy Communion
4th	11.00 a.m.	Holy Communion

Morning and Evening Prayer are said in Church every Friday at 8.00 a.m. & 4.00 p.m.

Special services January – April:

13th February Ash Wednesday 10.00 a.m. Holy Communion at Spelsbury
8.00 p.m. Holy Communion at Enstone

During Lent there will be a **Service of Compline** at Spelsbury Church at 7.30 p.m. beginning on **Wednesday, 20th February**

10th March Mothering Sunday 4.00 p.m. Family service
[There is **no** Family Service on 3rd March]

Sunday 17th March 11.00 a.m. Holy Communion followed by the
Annual Parochial Church Meeting

24th March Palm Sunday 10.45 a.m. Benefice service at Ascott
[with The Benefice Choir]

28th March Maundy Thursday 7.30 p.m. Holy Communion at Enstone

March 29th Good Friday 2.00 p.m. Service of Devotion at Spelsbury
30th March Holy Saturday Easter Vigil 9.00 p.m. at Chadlington
31st March Easter Day Dawn Eucharist 6.00 a.m. on a hill at Chadlington
[details on notice-board nearer the time!]
11.00 a.m. Holy Communion

For further details, or to book a Christening or Wedding, please telephone Mark Abrey on 01608 676572

ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Councillors would like to wish all villagers a very happy 2002 and assure them that they are always ready to help when required.

Plans for the Corner House Farm site are at present under discussion by the Planning Authorities and a decision regarding its future could possibly be resolved by the spring.

Oxfordshire County Council have agreed to erect a hand rail alongside the slope on the Maple Way-Heritage Lane footpath and hopefully this will soon be in place. Also three dog bins will be placed at sites in the village which it is hoped will help to mend this particular problem.

We are still pressing the matter of the evening trains but the situation with Railtrack adds to the difficulties.

Quotations have been requested regarding new metal memorial gates for the churchyard.

The problems of speeding in the village are a continuing matter of discussion at Parish Council meetings and at present the question of further roadside deterrents are being investigated.

Wendy Pearse, Parish Clerk

WYCHWOODS LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

On 15th November the members thoroughly enjoyed a talk given by Bill King on "Dad's Other Army - The British Resistance Movement 1940-1945". This covered a virtually unknown aspect of the Second World War - those British men, totally sworn to secrecy for decades, who would have formed the nucleus of resistance should this country have been invaded. Of necessity details have been very slow to emerge and at present Bill and his fellow researchers are engaged in compiling a book on the facts they have revealed to date. One item particularly of local interest was that the training centre for the cells was at Coleshill near Faringdon, a fact unknown to the local population. Recently an underground shelter has been discovered in the grounds which has been of great value to the researchers.

On Thursday, 21st February at 7.30 p.m. at Shipton, long time member of the Society, Alan Watkins from Churchill, will give another talk using his vast collection of post cards. This time the emphasis is on "Places and Events by Packer and Simms".

Then on Thursday, 21st March at 7.30 p.m. at Milton, Martin Way will talk about "Roses and Castles", the story of the canals.

Thursday, 18th April brings us to the 21st anniversary of the History Society, when a Members' Evening recalling the Society's past will be held at Shipton Village Hall at

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7.30 p.m.
Old and new members are welcome. Subscriptions are £5 for an individual and £8 for a couple which includes a copy of Wychwoods History when published. Visitors welcome at any meeting at £2 per person. Further details from Wendy Pearse on 831023.

REVEREND YORK - A VOICE OF FROM ASCOTT'S PAST

Amongst the Parish Council papers are some copies of extracts from the "LEAFIELD AND ASCOTT UNDER WYCHWOOD PARISH MAGAZINE" dated between 1878 and 1880. In 1973 the late Harry Mortimer, then Parish Clerk, borrowed the originals from the late Doris Warner of Centuries House, London Lane. Doris was very interested in Local History and obviously so was one of her ancestors, since these individual Parish Magazine pages had been retained in her family from the time of their original production.

They are obviously the work of the then Vicar of Ascott, the Rev. Samuel York, and probably of the then Vicar of Leafield, Rev. T.W. Lee, although nothing concerning Leafield has been retained.

From the records of births, deaths and marriages and the descriptions of various village happenings and events, an evocative and perhaps surprising picture of Ascott life in the latter part of the nineteenth century emerges and I hope to collate these details into some articles for the Grapevine. However other items appear in the magazines. Descriptions of local places and stately homes, extracts from past Parish Registers and other documents, Thoughts and Sermons, Visits and World Events. Perhaps to begin with, it would be interesting to quote one or two local tales, still current today, but using Rev. York's original words to tell the story.

"A TALE OF WYCHWOOD FOREST

The monarch oak, the patriarch of trees,
Shoots rising up, and spreads by slow degrees;
Three centuries he grows, and three he stays,
Supreme in state, and in three more, decays"

Doubtless if the venerable oaks of Wychwood Forest could speak, they would tell of many a strange occurrence that had happened amongst them in the past times. The following curious incident connected with the Forest hamlet of Ramsden is represented to have taken place, about 170 years since, in the reign of Queen Anne. The inhabitants of Ramsden, up to the year 1841 [as also those of Leafield], were compelled to carry their dead, by sets of bearers, through the Forest to the churchyard of their then Parish Church - Shipton - more than 5 miles distant. They had no church, or burial place of their own. An aged man of Ramsden, name Eldridge, having died, his body was borne on the way to Shipton Church. On reaching a part of the Forest, known as "Five Ash Bottom", the bearers rested awhile, placing the coffin on joint-stools or trussels, which they carried with them. They were about to resume their course, when suddenly a fine squirrel was seen to leap down from an oak tree close at hand. One of the bearers giving a shout, forthwith set off in eager pursuit. The others, carried away by the excitement of a squirrel hunt in prospect, speedily joined in the chase; but the lively little animal gave them a long run, and finally escaping into a walled coppice, completely baffled his pursuers. By this time the

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shades of evening were fast obscuring the forest glades and the squirrel hunters began to recollect where they had deposited their funeral burden. They hurried, with all haste, along what they imagined to be the right path, when, to their utter confusion, there came upon them a tempest of snow so thick and blinding, that not only were they unable to discover what they had lost, but they were within a little of being completely lost themselves. With very great difficulty, and after many hours of wandering about in the trackless snow, they managed, at last, to reach a place of refuge. On the following day they sought diligently for the deserted coffin, but not till after three days of wearisome search did they discover its whereabouts. The snow- flakes had formed a white hillock above and around it, so much resembling the low tufts of thorn-bushes, covered by the snow, that it was almost impossible to detect its exact position.

Time works changes, in some cases, manifestly for the better. Leaffield and Ramsden have experienced such a happier state. The parishioners thereof have surely great cause for thankfulness in enjoying such privileges, in these days, as a beautiful House of Prayer in their midst and a sleeping place for their dead. Moreover also they can boast of possessing a resident clergyman, excellent schools, and other benefits which their forefathers knew not.

MOTHER SHIPTON

This dame of bewitching and soothsaying renown, though a native of the north, is said to have dwelt at Shipton for many years and to have bequeathed her name to the place. She lived before the reign of King James, of witch-persecuting memory, or, if she had survived to this day, she would most probably have been brought to the stake and publicly burnt, as an ill doer. She is represented to have been “of stature much larger than common, her body crooked and her face frightful”. Amongst other marvellous tales, the origin of the well known Rollright (or Rollrich) Stones is ascribed to her magical arts. These stones are over 60 in number; some are known as “The King’s Men”, others as “The Five Knights”, the largest standing apart from the others in solitary majesty, is popularly called “The King’s Stone”; it is upwards of five feet broad and between eight and nine feet high. From this site, on a high ridge, separating Oxfordshire from the county of Warwick, there is an extensive and beautiful view of all the surrounding country, with the exception of Long Compton (not more than a mile distant) which is hidden by rising ground. The story runs as follows:- A certain prince or petty king, desired to rule over all England, and was assured by a magician (a great enemy of the old Shipton dame) that he would succeed if he once got a sight of Lord Compton. He marched from the south with a train of five knights and a chosen band of sixty soldiers, and halting for the night at the edge of Wychwood Forest, he sought the hut of the wise woman of Shipton to endeavour to propitiate her for the accomplishment of his enterprise. None of his followers ventured to draw near the dreaded witch, but at a distance, they waited their leader’s return. He received anything but a friendly reception; high words were heard to pass between the twain, and the harsh voice of Mother Shipton arose in loud threatening and, in the end, curses. The king came forth from the hut in great wrath, exclaiming “I defy thee, old hag. I defy thee”.

During the night following a terrible storm of thunder, lightning, and drenching rain burst over the village of Shipton two of the soldiers, sentinels on the watch, declared

that they distinctly say, amidst a blaze of lightning a figure flit in the sky towards the north, from the direction of the witch’s dwelling. Very early on the next day the little army set forth, and crossing Lyneham Heath and Knollbury Banks they left behind them the old Saxon Mart of Ceapen Northtown, and plunged into the woodland glades that yet interposed between them and the object desired. After a toilsome march they drew near the wished for summit of the ridge, the king hurried forward and exultingly repeated aloud the soothsayer’s promise:-

“If Long Compton thou mayest see,
Then King of England thou shalt be.”

Peals of mocking laughter, from some one invisible, followed his words; and, to his discomfiture, when he looked towards Long Compton, it could nowhere be seen; during the night Mother Shipton had caused the intervening ground to swell up so as to completely conceal its view from the hill. The king kept straining his eyes in vain search, when suddenly the gaunt and hateful form of the old sorceress stood before him, and waving her magic wand she hissed for the potent spell:-

“Move no more! Stand fast stone!
King of England, thou shalt be none.”

Instantly the king, his knights and his men, were all turned into stone.”

In the next magazine, Rev. York concluded the story.

“”The magician, whose promise had induced the ill-fated king to go on his ambitions errand, had become informed of the threats of his old enemy Mother Shipton, and dreading the effects of her malice and power, hastened to the rescue of the doomed band, but was too late to frustrate the witch’s incantation. Scarcely had she casted her spell, when, coming up suddenly from behind, he snatched the magical wand from her hand and instantly transformed her into an alder tree; and there she remains to this day, the companion of the petrified army; and it is the vulgar belief that whenever a branch of the tree is cut, it bleeds.

Legendary lore, and tales of old superstitions, however credible, are often highly interesting, especially those connected with localities familiar to us; such traditions generally combine facts with fiction; and evidence what has been and what still will be, implicitly believed by not a few.””

Wendy Pearse

NATURE’S YEAR

Picking blackberries for the freezer and seeing the abundance of other autumn crops gave me time to think about the past year. Although there was no heat wave and almost every weekend seemed to have been damp, if not soaking, this has been a very mild season. There were no late spring frosts and even early flowering fruits, like plums, set a heavy crop. The wild cherries were laden with fruit, although these disappeared very quickly once the blackbirds were alerted! Sloes, hawthorn, spindle, holly and hazel are all fully laden. Just outside Chadlington a walnut, growing in the verge, is carrying the heaviest crop I’ve ever seen.

This autumn bounty seems to be supporting frenetic activity amongst the local squirrel population; they are appearing in areas where I’ve not seen them before. I know that the Grey squirrel is a pest, especially to foresters, as it can wreak considerable damage to trees by “ring –barking” trunks and branches, but I still find

its activities amusing. Watching them gather hazel nuts, and then holding them in their forepaws and using sharp front teeth to remove the top of the nut and gain access to the kernel, shows considerable dexterity. Like all rodents the squirrel has four sharp chisel-shaped front teeth, which continue to grow throughout its life. They remain sharp because the hard enamel at the front wears down less rapidly than the softer dentine behind. Apart from nuts squirrels also eat bark, leaves and buds, flowers and fungi. In towns they become urban scavengers clearing away our leftovers and raiding bird tables.

Not all animals have flourished this season. The numbers of hares I've seen has fallen significantly. Two years ago they were bursting from every field on the hills around Ascott but suddenly they seem to have become scarce, possibly because of the very wet autumn, followed by an even wetter winter! Perhaps the change from winter to spring sown crops, because of the wet ground conditions, also has an effect. Unlike rabbits that have a warren, as a safe haven, hares make their home in the open fields, resting and bearing their young in small depressions scraped out of the ground, known as a "forms". To avoid leaving a scent track, for predators to follow, they perform a series of bounds in random directions when leaving their form. Feeding at dusk, they eat any plant material that is available and can become a pest to gardeners as they enjoy carrots and other root crops. Hares may have three or four litters a year, the first in early spring. The young are born with their eyes open and they can be independent of their mother in as little as one month. The mad march hares are rutting males (Jacks) fighting for territory. These fights can lead to serious injury after kicks from powerful hind legs. When hurt the "Jack" is said to scream; a sound like a child's cry. Like the hare bats haven't enjoyed the cool wet season, which has reduced the availability of their food, and their presence, flying around the village on summer evenings, has diminished. They hunt for night flying moths and beetles, which they find by echolocation. Most of the bats seen in the village will be pipistrelles, our smallest and commonest species, with a body length of one and half inches and a wingspan of eight inches. They remain active all night returning to a temporary roost during the day. They hibernate in the winter choosing a site that is cool but protected from freezing temperatures. Often many bats will hibernate together, even mixing species, choosing a suitable site such as a church tower, the roof space in a house, a disused railway tunnel, or a cave. Bats are a protected species and must never be disturbed!

Numbers of Raptors continue to increase, with more and more sightings of Sparrow Hawks and Buzzards. This year, for the first time, I've watched Buzzards circling over Ascott, climbing on warm air thermals, drifting higher and higher, with almost no effort. In previous years I've watched them at Ditchley and seen them in the Windrush valley at Minster Lovell but population growth seems to be encouraging them to visit and hunt in the countryside around Ascott. Buzzards may be popular with me but the local rooks mob them quite viciously if they stray too close to their feeding and roosting areas!

Weasels too, have been abundant. Not that you have much opportunity to watch them. The most you can hope for is a brief view as they dash across the road or path ahead. The weasel is the smallest of the Mustelidae, the family to which Otters, mink and ferrets belong. This ferocious "killing-machine" lives on mice, voles and shrews. One

weasel will consume over one hundred small rodents each year, a very efficient mousetrap! Each weasel will have a territory covering ten to twenty acres over which it hunts. Their small size and agility allow them to chase prey down the smallest burrow or into the tightest crevice.

One creature that I had hoped to see this year was an adult Grass snake. I know they live in the area. I found a newly born snake, which was approximately six inches long and I've seen some slightly larger snakes that had been killed on the roads but I've yet to find a fully grown, three to four foot, long adult. Their preferred habitats are damp places, including riverbanks and ditches, where they will swim in pursuit of their favourite food, a frog, toad or newt. Like all cold-blooded creatures they like to sunbathe at the start of the day in order to raise their body temperature. They are most active in the warm weather, hibernating in the winter under tree roots or similar safe places. As a rule several may associate in hibernation and when found may be twined together in intricate knots. Hibernation ends in March or April and then mating takes place. The eggs are laid somewhere warm, such as a compost heap or in a pile of fresh horse manure sometime between June and August. The natural heat generated assists incubation. Up to one dozen small eggs are laid and they immediately start to absorb moisture from their surroundings increasing in size until about one and a quarter inches long. They hatch in six to ten weeks. Keep your eyes open; I would love to find a local habitat of this fascinating animal.

LOCAL NEWS - What is fluorescent, bright green, four to five inches long, the thickness of a finger and visiting from Africa? No, not another illegal immigrant but the caterpillar of our largest hawk moth, the Deaths Head. This moth normally lives in Africa and southern Europe, but migrates north each year, arriving in England in July. It lays its eggs on potato plants or others of the same species, such as the nightshades. It was found in Ascott when crop a of potatoes was being harvested and after identification transferred to a new home on another plot. Sadly, our winters are too cold and wet for the Deaths Head to survive, even if it pupates. It was an unusual and interesting find. What a pity that we didn't see the adult moth. With a wingspan of four to five inches, bold yellow and black markings on its hind wings and a skull pattern on its thorax, it would have been an impressive sight. Incidentally, determined not to be outdone, Milton has been visited by the same beast for the last three years!

Sorry if this article appears to belong to another season but unfortunately thanks to the wonders of the modern computer it was lost somewhere on the 'Internet super-highway.' Even I don't pick blackberries in January.

Stuart Fox

THE ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD WEB SITE

The Ascott-under-Wychwood web site can be found at <http://www.ascott-under-wychwood.org.uk>; currently the content is a bit thin on the ground, but it is hoped that the web site will grow as more contributions are made by local people.

It is anticipated that this issue of TAG will be available online, both as a html formatted document, suitable for viewing directly off the screen, and as an Adobe pdf file which is more suitable for printing and reading offline. One of the benefits of having TAG online is that the AUW web site has its own internal search engine, which makes it far easier to locate an article using a few choice keywords or phrases.

Clearly as more back issues of TAG are added, the web site will become a valuable tool for research and location information about Ascott-under-Wychwood.

Another feature of the web site is the Ascott-under-Wychwood online forum. Here, anyone can create or join threads of discussions that are organised as a series of topics regarding AUW [or anything else for that matter]. Presently, there is only a General topic active, more will be added as demands dictate. Again, the forum is searchable. If you want to start a new topic of interest, e-mail one of the contacts below.

If you have any suggestions or want to contribute material [articles, photos. Etc.] for the web site, then either e-mail the web site administrator, webmaster@ascott-under-wychwood.org.uk, or e-mail Paul Cunningham, pjcunningham@borsuk.uk.net or telephone him on 01993 832713.

P.S. You'll probably want to bookmark the URL for future use as it's a quite a lengthy one (39 characters).

TIDDY HALL

The folk night on the 3rd November raised £1,029.05, of which £183.90 raised on the raffle was donated to the Scott Sports Club, to help towards the running costs of the pavilion.

The craft fair on the 10th November raised £758.25.

Thank you to everyone who helped run these events. The money raised covered the cost of the wall mounted quartz heaters recently installed in the hall [NB. The control instructions for these heaters are next to the heating switches in the storeroom].

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Saturday, 26 th January	Anniversary Dance 8 p.m. – midnight
Saturday, 18 th May	Abe Singers - 7.30 p.m. for 8 p.m. start
Saturday, 2 nd November	Folk Night with The Yetties
Saturday, 9 th November	Craft Fair

Booking Clerk: Rosemary Dawbarn 831632.

QUEEN'S GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS - As a village do we want to celebrate the Queen's golden jubilee? If so, any ideas on what we should do? The Tiddy Hall is available without charge, if only as a standby in case it rains.

POPPY APPEAL

The recent house-to-house collection for the Poppy Appeal fund amounted to £459.9. Many thanks to Mrs. Carol Hawtin, Mrs. Mary Barnes, Mrs. Kate Gidman, Mrs. Jill Stedeford, Mrs. Kathy Pearce and Mrs. Joan Lilly for their help.

Mavis Mortimer, Poppy Appeal Organiser

ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD W.I.

On Monday 22 October, 31 of us sat down to Harvest Lunch in Tiddy Hall. We had beef stew accompanied by peas, callabrese and mashed potatoes and this was followed by a variety of puddings, coffee and mints. We were then entertained by a couple of ladies from Shipton who read an assortment of poems, some of which were very topical mentioning the WI, Harvest Festival and the Evenlode. They finished with a mime of Joyce Grenfell's "Stately as a Galleon, we sailed across the Floor"

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which was a humorous ending to a lively entertainment.

Monday 19 November was a very special evening for members of Ascott-under-Wychwood W.I. We celebrated our 70th Anniversary. So we decorated the hall with flowers, balloons and candles and invited Liz Eaton and Barbara Gray from Middle Way, Ann Firkins (Group Convenor) and Lynda Conway (Group Link) to come along and join us together with representatives from Bledington, Chadlington, Milton-under-Wychwood and Shipton-under-Wychwood W.I. We had a superb talk by Graham Soden on 'Scotland – Wild Life and Wild Places' which was illustrated by some stunning slides. This was followed by refreshments, some wine and a 70th Anniversary Cake decorated on top with the W.I. Tree, our name and 70th Anniversary and with little edible bottles of champagne and 70s round the sides. The cake looked (and tasted) fantastic and was much admired and we are very grateful to Ruth Wastie for all the time and effort she put into making it. We had hoped our 3 founder members, Mrs Phyllis Campbell, Miss Lily Edginton and Mrs Evelyn Storey would be able to join us but unfortunately ill health prevented them from doing so. They were much missed. It was a really good evening and a most enjoyable way to celebrate 70 years of the W.I. in Ascott.

For our Christmas outing this year, 9 of us went to the Plough at Finstock where we enjoyed an excellent meal. Those of us who ordered pheasant, found we had a whole one placed before us plus all the trimmings and vegetables and we were then expected to eat a pudding as well. None of us faltered! We made quite a noisy group in the corner as we pulled our crackers and laughed and talked the evening away, lubricating our throats with wine as we went along (except for the poor old drivers). It was all great fun and a good start to the Christmas festivities.

TOAD PATROL VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

We are part of a national endeavour to try and halt the decline of amphibians, and our registered site at Manor Farm Pond, Ascott-under-Wychwood has provided useful statistics, although showing a falling population over the past few years.

Volunteers need to be able to commit to a named evening each week. The annual migration mating time may come at any time from early February to mid-April, but only when the dusk-time temperature is high enough and then only for a few hours of that evening. Protective fluorescent vests and traffic warning signs are provided to alert road traffic of our activities. For more information about toads and the toad patrol statistics over the past few years at Ascott-under-Wychwood, take a look at <http://www.ascott-under-wychwood.org.uk> and enter the word "Toad" in the search box.

If you are interested in volunteering then please contact me, Paul Cunningham on 01993 832713 or e-mail toadpatrol@ascott-under-wychwood.org.uk. I will be contacting previous volunteers shortly about their availability in the coming months.

That was the year that was ...

Last year was quite an eventful year for the Ascott under Wychwood Sports Club. With the advent of foot and mouth it meant the football club had to find alternative arrangements. And then when we thought things might be getting back to normal, down came the rain (which always seemed to happen at a weekend) and we ended up

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playing just over half of our planned cricket fixtures.

We also said goodbye in 2001 to two committee stalwarts; Mike Hunt and Shane Barnes. Together with Chairman, Roger Shepherd the three of them had overseen the old changing rooms replaced by the new sports pavilion. We wish Mike and Shane every success in their lives away from the village and they know they will always be welcome in Ascott for the contribution they have made to sport.

2001 might have been a little uncertain at times but at least we were able to call on the services of Mary Barnes who kept the pavilion ship shape week in week out. Thank you Mary.

So, it's on to 2002 and some exciting times ahead. The football and cricket teams continue to prosper and this has now been supplemented by the Wychwood Boys FC choosing to use Ascott for their Sunday morning matches as well as a request by Shipton under Wychwood who have asked for our help to accommodate their newly formed cricket thirds. This we have agreed to do which will bring some much needed funding into the Sports Club.

As a result sport will be played at the playing fields winter and summer on Saturdays and Sundays.

To ensure the Sports Club committee is run successfully for the benefit of all in Ascott, we do need a properly structured committee to oversee the activities and set policy. Currently, we have a Chair and Secretary but with Shane moving on we are short of a Treasurer. If there is someone out there that believes in the virtues of sport in the community and would like to lend a hand then please let us know where you are!!

Running a Sports Club doesn't come cheap and this year we have been hit hard with a doubling of fees for insurance together with other costs associated with managing the improved facilities. To keep afloat it is not unusual for benefactors to pass across much needed loans or donations.

However, we also have to be responsible for our own fundraising and in a village where there are a number of other (needy) associations it does mean we sometimes conflict with one another.

So, watch out for a coffee morning and folk evening to be organised by Lyn Collins, a car boot sale to be run around the Easter break on the playing fields and a dance organised by one of the cricketers who fronts a successful rock band.

If you want to know more about the Sports Club and you fancy getting involved give me a call. The more interest the better. We never turn away a good idea ... or a good donation.

Enjoy the sporting year ahead, World Cup et al.

John Cull, Secretary

LEAFIELD SCHOOL NEWS

It seems a long while ago that we all filled our Church listening to our children performing their very successful carol and nativity concert, but here we are already well into the next term with half term and Easter fast approaching. The new term has brought with it lots of exciting activities to our village school and children. A school council is now up and running with officers recently elected. As well as airing the views and ideas of the pupils, they will be organising and planning rotas for

playground activities and hope to arrange some events in the near future.

A number of children have just started violin lessons. We wish them all success with this difficult instrument and look forward to reporting on progress. With the wide range of instruments that are now being played here we anticipate more musical entertainment in the future. The Netball Club will be starting again, so together with football, PE and their active playtimes Leaffield children have every opportunity for plenty of exercise and involvement in team games.

School Admissions - Admission forms are now being circulated for the next intake, numbers for which are fast approaching maximum, so anyone who wishes to send their child to Leaffield should contact the head, Mrs. Lesley Ryde, as soon as possible and get their application admitted. In any event should you wish to discuss any matters relating to the School then please feel free to telephone 01993 878273.

Vicky Greves, Governor

THE SWAN at ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD

This delightful Cotswold inn is highly prized by the local community and those from villages all around. If you have not visited this hostelry recently it is very well worth a trip for you to appreciate the warmth that arrived with the Landlord, Ian Merritt. A wide range of beverages are available to suit your tastes and the food, all prepared by Mr. Merritt himself, is extensive, good quality, hearty fare.

All day breakfasts are a real treat at The Swan and appreciated by many a local and visitor in the Cotswolds

Wednesday night attracts many to the full filled quiz night where a great time is had by the many who participate.

A recent complement to his inn is the newly opened restaurant which gives diners the flexibility to dine in a non-smoking environment if desired. Sunday lunches are particularly popular at The Swan with a range of roasts on offer. Best booked in advance to avoid disappointment - or even to take away!

All of this adds up to a completely enjoyable and comfortable eating or drinking experience that has to be appreciated. Try having a meal there - you'll **enjoy it!**

CHARLBURY TAXI BUS SERVICE

The future of the Charlbury Taxi-bus service, which has been running since last March, has been guaranteed to June 2003. Generous extra funding from the County Council means the significant cost of subsidising the service will be covered and Worths' Bus Company has been given the contract to continue running the service.

The timetable will remain unchanged until 1 June 2002 when the Thames Trains Summer timetable comes into effect. The service provides a ten-minute journey from the Swan in Ascott to Charlbury station and a 24-minute return journey via Charlbury, Finstock and Leaffield (and a 30-minute journey including Shipton between 1020 and 1655 hours). The bus is a modern 16-seater Mercedes and is easily recognised by the distinctive white-purple and green livery; it will stop for passengers who flag it down provided it is safe to stop.

This service began as a trial after much lobbying on behalf of rural communities. After ten months it is beginning to prove its reliability and value for money and more people are making use of it. A recent survey and report by an Oxford Brookes

University student has confirmed passengers are satisfied with the service as being clean, reliable, safe and cheap. The Monday - Friday service is becoming quite popular with commuters and shoppers but the Saturday service is still seriously underused.

Free timetables are available from the bus.

EVELYN BARBARA GIVEN
5th December 1918 – 24th June 2001

My Mother's first name was Evelyn but everyone called her Barbara from childhood. She was born and grew up in Liverpool. Shortly before the war, she went to Oxford - to St. Hilda's College to read history. It was during that time that she came to love the Cotswolds. She and Peter, a fellow undergraduate who was later to become her husband, would ride out with friends to Blenheim Palace for picnics and on to country pubs in the villages beyond.

They must have had good times. I can just remember, some years later, them bringing me to the Cotswolds for a cycling holiday. We stayed in bed and breakfasts, on the spartan side as I recall, but serving lavish breakfasts even though rationing was probably still in force. During the day, I, a wee girl, would be sat in one of those little seats over the back wheel hanging onto my Father's coat tails, and we would be forever stopping to look around old churches. Incredibly, as it now seems, I do believe my Father at one point had a push bike and sidecar which Barbara and I would ride in.

During the war Barbara served in the Royal Air Force, a time she told me - half ashamed, half defiant - that was one of the happiest periods of her life. Dreadful as it was never knowing whether the flight crews might come back from a mission, she enjoyed the intensity, the sense of having a purpose, and the comradeship.

Towards the end of the war, she and Peter were married at St. Cross Church in Oxford. He became a research scientist, Barbara joined the Civil Service. When I was about ten, she decided she was bored with that and did another course, this time at a London college, to come an archivist. Looking back I now realise that she was quite extraordinarily industrious. As well as having a full time job, she was always making things - weaving rugs, knitting jumpers, sewing and smocking little frocks for me.

When she retired, she moved from London to South Woodchester - in the Cotswolds, but over near Stroud. It was when Peter died that she decided to make a fresh start and moved to Ascott.

It turned out to be a very happy choice for many reasons. My Mother was always a bit of a leftie politically, though in her middle years she turned a bit Liberalish. Not that Ascott is a hotbed of radicals, least so far as I know, but to me as an outsider, it has always seems a particularly democratic village - few over-whelmingly grand buildings, no fancy war memorial but instead a sports field that everyone can enjoy [as well as the churchyard gates]. And, of course, there's the wonderfully inspiring legacy of the Ascott martyrs, the wives of the striking agricultural workers who were jailed for supporting their husbands.

Barbara was quite able bodied when she first lived here and began learning bell

ringing at Ascott Church. I was moved and grateful that a team of bell ringers were able to turn out for her funeral in June, even though several of the regular Ascott crew were away on holiday.

Over the years, her health began to fail her. It wasn't Alzheimer's but something similar. It sounds a terrifying condition, and so it can be, but in my Mother's case it was strangely merciful. Arthritis, which had troubled her all her adult life, seemed almost to disappear. Her physical and mental decline went hand in hand so that she was not entirely aware of what was happening to her. Her last years, I know, would have been nothing like as happy had she stayed in London. So many people from Ascott and further afield were so good to her - Ruth and Chris Wastie, Mary Barnes, Gerhard Niebuhr, Bertha Carpenter, Richard Franks, the district nurses, the Milton doctors. These are just the ones I know. Barbara would have named many more. Then, of course, there was Brenda Harding and the rest of the Oxfordshire County Council community care team, who by the end were visiting my Mother several times a day. It wasn't just professionalism and care they gave her, but love. I can't thank them enough.

Barbara's ashes are to be buried in Ascott churchyard. I couldn't imagine a better place for her to be - at the heart of a beautiful village, beside just the kind of handsome old church she loved, and within a stone's throw of The Swan, which, maybe, as a bicycling student in baggy shorts, she once visited 60 odd years ago.

Helen Oldfield

Jumble Sale - Milton Village Hall, Saturday, 23rd February at 2 p.m.

In aid of WYCHWOOD HANDICRAFT SOCIETY

Come and join us for a Folk Night at Tiddy Hall on Saturday 2nd March, 7.15 for 8 p.m. start. Paul Weaving and "The Last Straw" and other local artists. Beer & Wine Bar. Tickets £6 [830114/830227] In aid of Ascott Sports Club.

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)

Burford - Friends Meeting House, Pytts Lane (off Witney Street)

Sundays 11.00 a.m.

For further information, contact Nigel Braithwaite on 01993 831282

Charlbury - Friends Meeting House, Market Street - Sundays 10.30 a.m.

For further information, contact Andrew or Patricia Pymmer on 01993 882848

ROMAN CATHOLIC MASSES

Burford - Church of SS. John Fisher and Thomas Moore

Sundays at 9.15 a.m. & 11.00 a.m.; Holy Days 10.00 a.m. & 7.00p.m.

Chipping Norton -Holy Trinity Church

Sundays at 10.30 a.m.; Holy Days 9.00 a.m. & 7.00 p.m.

Charlbury - St. Teresa's

Sundays at 11.00 a.m.; Holy Days 9.30 a.m. & 7.30 p.m.

David Cameron M.P. is chairing a meeting at STONESFIELD VILLAGE on MONDAY 18th FEBRUARY at 7.30 p.m. to which all rail passengers and local people are invited to put questions to the General Manager of Thames Trains, Mr. Terry Worrall.

It is our opportunity to make it clear that the railway and our station are critically important to our rural community and that the very basic service that we had to and from Oxford must be reinstated. If people want trains to continue to stop at Ascott we need to make it clear that any attempt by Thames Trains to end the stopping service or to continue the later evening service that began in September for a one year trial period and is far less convenient for most passengers, will be opposed by the public. If anybody would like a lift to this meeting please ring Anne Braithwaite on 831282.

**Accommodation available in friendly BED AND BREAKFAST
THE MILL, MILL LANE, ASCOTT-UNDER-WYCHWOOD
Please contact: Anne and Nigel Braithwaite [01993 831282]**

**Do you need a BABYSITTER?
If so, ring Leisha Braithwaite on 01993 831282**

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Printed by Information Press

Tel. No: 01865 882588