

# **Bletsoe Gazette 2005**

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# Sharnbrook News

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# Parish Council

## Bucking the Trend

Since the circulation of the Council's annual report, following the Parish Meeting in April, there has been a radical change in the conduct of Parish Council business. In place of the long-established practice of meeting once a month (except in August), it was resolved in July to try out, initially for a period of six months, a reduction to four regular meetings per year – to be held on the first Monday of October, January, April and July. The move was precipitated by a requirement to observe national hourly rates for the payment of parish clerks, the financial implications of which would have led to an increase of some £1500 in the parish precept! But there was also a feeling that councillors themselves were expending more time on administration than was necessary for a parish as small as Bletsoe.

Though bureaucracy is increasing in all forms of government, continually expanding to fill the time available, your parish council hopes to buck the trend by limiting the time available for expansion. It is early days yet, but the Clerk's workload has already been reduced and there is no evidence that the loss of September's meeting has adversely affected the council's management of parish affairs.

The clerk and councillors still attend to day-to-day matters between meetings and are available to be consulted at any time.

## Talking Rubbish

At the June meeting, parishioners were able to hear the Mayor of Bedford, Mr Frank Branston, speak about matters that particularly concern the rural parishes – notably road traffic, planning, fly-tipping and rubbish collection. Along with Stuart Briggs (Bedford Borough's Refuse Officer) and Cllr Ian Clifton, he responded to a variety of questions, and several rubbish-clearing initiatives flowed directly from their visit.

### *.. policies to combat the increasing menace of commercial fly-tipping*

At the October meeting, Council heard from Mr John Gilford (the Borough's Waste Services Manager) about policies to combat the increasing menace of commercial fly-tipping. Though severe penalties can be imposed, detection and prosecution depend to a great extent upon the vigilance of members of the public, their ability to produce hard evidence and their readiness to testify in court.

Residents are asked to notify the Clerk immediately if they have any information about dumping within the parish.

## Modest Improvements

The recent re-surfacing of the lower reaches of Memorial Lane may seem hardly worthy of comment but, in the light of the effort required over the past ten years to persuade the County

Council to undertake more than perfunctory patching, it could well rank as the achievement of the decade. Furthermore, we have been promised that the surface of the lane will be dressed with chippings to unify its appearance. Please drive slowly if and when it happens!

You may also have noticed that the approach to the village from the A6 has been slightly improved, in that the dead trees on the south side of The Avenue have been removed, thanks to the combined efforts of the present and former tree wardens. Attempts to enlist the help of the absentee landlord with the maintenance of the rest of the hedgerow have unfortunately met with little success.

## **Conserving Bletsoe**

Further to the proposal alluded to in the Annual Report, the Council has now set in motion, with the valued help of David Baker, the formal process for establishing a 'Conservation Area' within the village of Bletsoe. As a more manageable alternative to the suspended Parish Plan, the delineation of such an area should help to preserve the essential character of the village without introducing unacceptable conditions. Parishioners will be fully consulted as the process develops.

***... the provision of additional equipment for older children***

## **Looking to the Future**

Now that Bletsoe has a growing teenage population, the Council has been petitioned to consider the

provision of additional equipment, such as basketball goals, for older children. The possibility of obtaining a Rural Grant for a hard play-area is also being investigated.

## **Parish Paths**

Despite diplomatic approaches to Bedfordia Farms by Ed Burnett of the County Council, on behalf of the Bletsoe Parish Paths Partnership group, inveterate walkers will have noticed that Bedfordia have again ploughed their former set-aside right up to the hedgerows. This would appear to confirm that they wish to discourage pedestrian access, except along the public right of way that runs diagonally uphill from the Parish Field.

The Council is given to understand that damage to crops caused by horse-riders is the principal reason for this apparent intransigence. However, Ed Burnett is still ready to pursue negotiations for exclusively pedestrian access, under a scheme whereby the County Council would be responsible for maintaining 'permissive' paths and might even provide horse-proof kissing-gates! In the meantime, forgive us our trespasses!

## **Thanks**

A special vote of thanks is again due to those parishioners who have freely undertaken work on behalf of the parish, especially Mick O'Connor, Jonathan Eames, David Baker, Richard Hales and Joyce and Nick Crocker. The Parish Council is also grateful to our new County Councillor, Jane Walker, who has conscientiously attended our meetings and is always ready to advise and help us.



## Parish Council Details

Names and telephone numbers of present members of the Council are:

Edward Bean	781372
Richard Day (Tree Warden)	783184
Ann Gibbons	781161
Michael Grimes	781183
Peter Hetherington	781851
David Martin	782579
Jocelyn Wallis	781604

Clerk: Malcolm Rowland 781646

As the chairmanship of the Council continues to rotate, all councillors have the valuable experience of taking the chair and conducting meetings.

If you wish to raise parish issues, do not hesitate to contact any of the above.

Council meetings are open to members of the public, who have the opportunity to speak on parish concerns. Agendas are posted at least one week in advance on the parish notice boards, and minutes of the previous meeting are displayed in the church porch.

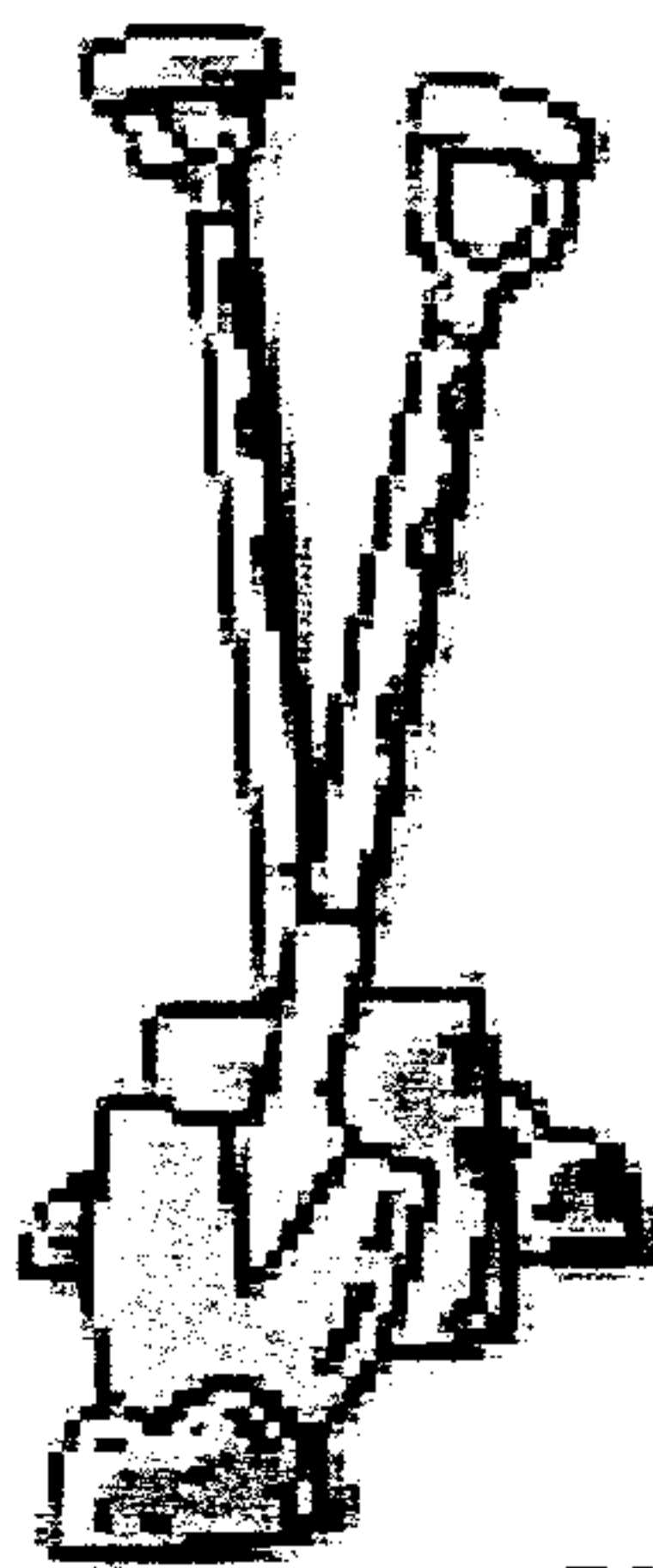
*Peter Hetherington*

## Tree & Hedge Planting

At the last parish annual general meeting, it was decided to plant a new thorn hedge in the parish playing field. This hedge would be alongside the post and rail fence starting at Coplowe Lane gate and back towards the Village Hall, as far as the end of the spinney, a length of about 150 metres.

We are hoping to have a Hedge Planting Day during the Christmas/New Year break. We hope to get all the family out to work off the Christmas excesses. This will include the planting of whips and applying rabbit guards. Starting at 9am, the planting day will be on Friday 30th December. 'Many hands make light

work', so could as many people come and help, including children, and please bring a spade with you.



If you require any trees or hedge plants, for your own use, we can get them from the County Council. These can be made available, for small or large schemes within the village, and are free of charge as long as they have some amenity value or can be seen from the road or footpath.

If anybody is interested, or needs any help and advice, please contact me on 01234 783184 or 07889 713613.

*Richard Day, Tree Warden*

# Village Hall

## Events

Last year's Christmas Dance, with the Dave Stott trio was a great success and the food was tasty too. This year it is to be held on Saturday 10th December with "Unison" who have been highly recommended. Tickets, which include dinner, will cost £12. The family Christmas social with a visit from Father Christmas for the under 10's, and with the Christmas raffle will take place on the following Saturday 17th December. This is an opportunity to win the top cash prize or one of many others (that have been donated) this will help support your village hall.

The Valentines Dance and the Friday night social (which we intend to repeat) were also enjoyable. "Running on Empty" came on the 1st October, we had a poor attendance for this event, but they were very good and consequently have been asked to return for our New Year Dance.

## Maintenance

Thankfully, last year before Chris left the village for sunnier climes he organized a lot of work to be carried out on the village hall for health and

***... total cost to the Village Hall has amounted to a three-figure sum.***

safety reasons; he left the hall in good order. Unfortunately, we have encountered further unexpected expenses this year due to stones

being thrown on the roof and two windows being accidentally broken. The total cost to the Village Hall has amounted to a three-figure sum. Bletsoe Village Hall is a charity. The duty of this charity is to provide this village with an amenity it can be proud of. Its funds are raised by the committee, the support of the residents and the hiring of the hall to individuals, groups, clubs and organizations. The hall is for everyone's enjoyment, so if you have any ideas for something new or want to make a comment please let one of us know.

## Committee

Sadly Chris Baldwin and Peter Briar left the committee last year and have been greatly missed. Thankfully Jean Jevons (treasurer) and Mike Grimes joined the committee both giving lots of help and new ideas.

The committee is always looking for other members of the community to join in with running the hall so if your interested please let Maria, Barbara or another member of the committee know.

The present committee is

Maria Caves (Chairman)  
Barbara Button (Secretary)  
Jean Jevons (Treasurer)  
Hazel Mitchell (Food coordinator)  
Joyce Cullen  
Dave Martin  
Mike Gibbons  
Mike Grimes

## Forthcoming events

Bonfire night 5th November starts at 6.30pm

Christmas Dance with 'Unison' 10th December

Family Social and Draw 17th December

New years Dance with 'Running on Empty' 31st December

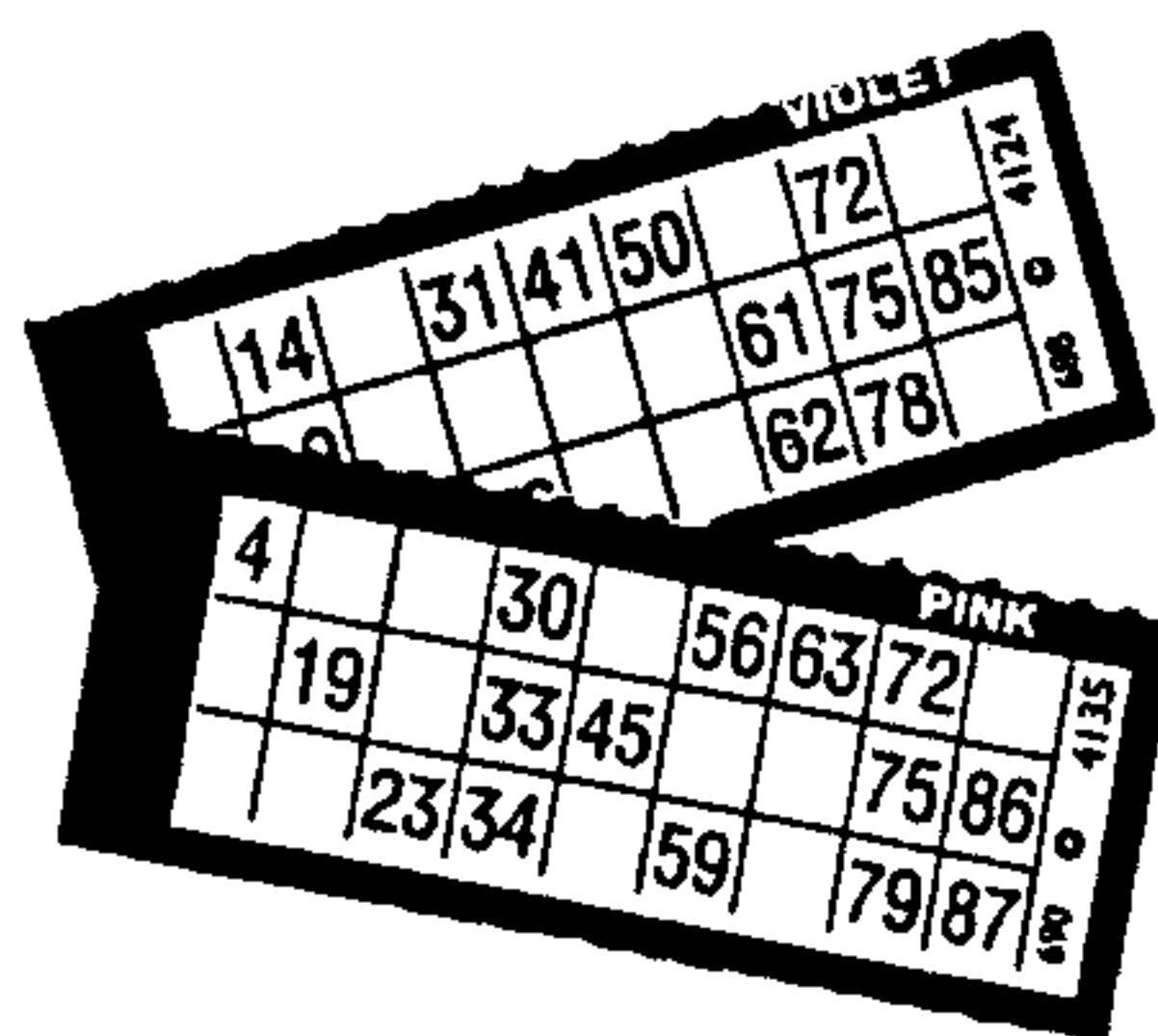
Valentine's Event with 'Cockney Pride' 18th February 2006

*For more information and to book tickets phone Barbara 781813*

## Bingo

If you enjoy a game of Bingo why not come and join us in the Village Hall at 7.30pm on every fourth Friday. Watch the notice boards or Barbara's tree for dates. The next Bingo evening is on Friday, 25th November.

*Barbara Button and Hazel Mitchell*



## Coffee Mornings



If you fancy a coffee and chat and the opportunity to meet other villagers, why not join us? Come to the Village Hall on the second Thursday of each month at 10.30am. A warm welcome awaits you.

*Hazel Mitchell and Barbara Button*



## Library Bus

We are fortunate that we are still scheduled to have a library van calling after the changes being made to the service. Starting on December 8th, the

van will call fortnightly on Thursdays. It will be in the lay-by near the church from 12.15 to 12.25.

*Jocelyn Wallis*



# Bletsoe Women's Institute

We meet on the second Tuesday of each month at 7.45pm in the Village Hall and we have speakers on various subjects. If you are interested in coming to a meeting you will be made very welcome. We are a small Institute but we enjoy getting together.

In December we have a Christmas party and we invite all the Senior Citizens in the village to join us. If you are a senior citizen, then you are eligible to attend and if you would like to come, please contact Barbara Button on 781813.

*Barbara Button, President*

## Friends of St Mary's

The 'Friends of St Mary's' are the group who raise money to ensure the maintenance and repair of the oldest and most impressive of village buildings - St Mary's Church.

### Maintenance

This year was the year of the 'quinquennial inspection' - the obligatory visit by the church architect to advise of the work which needs to be done on the church, in the next five years. These are graded from those repairs that need to be done

the next five years is over £22,000, a large sum for such a small village.

The cracks which have appeared in the west wall over the last couple of years are being monitored. The remedial work which would be necessary to solve this problem would be extremely expensive underpinning, luckily we have been advised that this isn't necessary at the moment

To do any work we have to employ specialist craftsmen, so costs are high. We have various events throughout the year to try to raise funds so this work can be carried out.

***... over £22,000 is needed just to keep the church in good repair over the next five years***

immediately to stop the building from falling down (thankfully not too many of those!) to those which would be good to do if funding was no problem (if only!).

The total cost of work needed just to keep the church in good repair over

### Fundraising

We appreciate very much our share of the fete proceeds, this gives us an annual injection of much need cash and we would like to thank the fete committee for all their hard work in raising such a wonderful sum of money. We would also like to thank all those who, very generously, make regular donations through 'gift aid'. It

helps a lot to get this regular flow of money, and is even better when we can get some back from the taxman! If anyone would like to help in this way please contact any of the committee members.

We hold a variety of events throughout the year to appeal to all ages and tastes — both musical and culinary.

## Events

A concert of choral music by '**Cantamus**' gave us an excellent start to the Christmas season last year. Our next musical event was an evening of jazz (and curry) when an extremely talented group of youngsters called '**Jazz Platoon**' entertained a hall full of villagers and friends of all ages. We were very lucky to have a return of the '**Bonas Brothers**' who provided another wonderful evening with a mix of rock, blues and folk music.

For those who like the quieter life, we held a **Safari Supper**, hosted by four very generous couples who each opened their doors for one of the courses and between them provided a wonderful meal. Many thanks to our hosts for making everyone so welcome and providing such congenial surroundings and scrumptious food.

We again held our annual **Plant Sale** at the end of April. We had more, and a greater variety, of stalls this year, so had to overflow outside (luckily the weather was kind!). This is now a permanent fixture on the calendar, so make a note of Sunday 30 April 2006.

## Plants needed

However, in the meantime, if you are at all green fingered please bear us in mind when you are dividing up plants or digging up seedlings, we are very willing recipients. Thank you to all those who have so generously given plants for the 'home grown' stall in the past — it makes all the difference.

## 'The Friends'

We would like to thank all those who have supported us through the year and would encourage anyone who has never been to one of our events to come along and give it a try!

Our next event is an illustrated talk on the **History of Bletsoe** by David Baker, our very own local historian and archeologist. If you haven't lived in the village for very long, this is an ideal way to find out about your local history first hand, and for those of you who have heard a talk from David before, he is promising something new this time.

If you have any comments or ideas for future events please contact any of us or come along to our AGM on 17 November and air your views then.

Alison Bean (Chairman) 781179  
Ray Franklin (Treasurer) 782305  
June Jones (Secretary) 781824  
Edward Bean 781372  
Mike Gibbons 781161  
Pauline Hamill 0787 6450810  
David Martin 782579

*Alison Bean, Chairman*



# St Mary's Bletsoe

## David's departure

At the beginning of the year, David Bourne, for the past 20 years Rector of Bletsoe (and Vicar of Riseley), announced that he would be departing to take up a new challenge as Vicar of Hailsham, a market town in West Sussex.

David, who did so much to sustain and grow the congregations and youth work in both parishes, and train and support non-ordained ministry, will be sadly missed by all who knew him or worked with him, but we nonetheless rejoice that he will be carrying forward the work of the church in a parish in greater need of his leadership and foresight.

Following one of David's last services in Bletsoe, the congregation, the PCC, and the Churchwardens took the opportunity to thank David and Eluned for their outstanding work and their warm friendship over the past years,

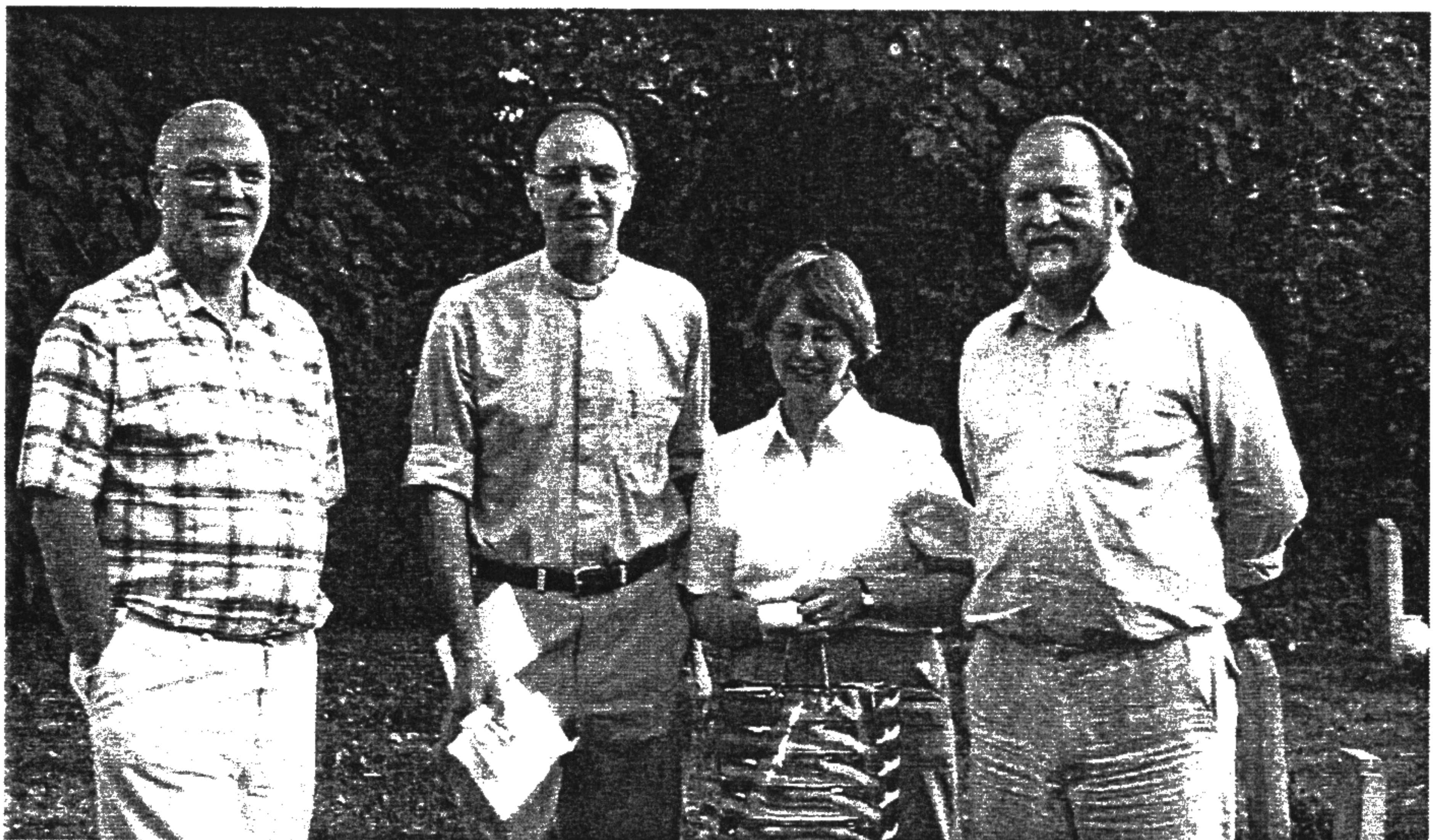
and wish them every success in their new and challenging parish.

## Recruiting a new rector

Following the announcement of David's departure, the Churchwardens and PCC have been working closely with their opposite numbers in Riseley to produce a detailed profile of the two parishes, and subsequently with the Patron in order to produce the necessary documentation and complete all the formal administrative steps towards advertising the post.

### *... three excellent candidates shortlisted*

The Patrons, in our case the *Martyrs Memorial and Church of England Trust*, in effect act in the role of recruitment advisers and hold the ancient right to "present" candidates for selection. All this hard work was





rewarded by three excellent candidates being short-listed by the Patron.

Each of the candidates, along with their respective wives then visited the parishes in early October and met the churchwardens and church council members of the two parishes. The formal interviews were conducted in mid-October by a panel of seven consisting of two representatives from each of the parishes, the Bishop of Bedford, the Archdeacon of Bedford, and a representative of the Patrons.

An offer has since been made to one of the candidates, but we will have to wait until all the legal hurdles are cleared and the appointment is formally confirmed by the Diocesan

Bishop before any announcement can be made.

## **In the meantime**

Since David's departure, we have been blessed with a stream of able and interesting preachers, each bringing a fresh perspective to the

***... a stream of able and interesting preachers***

Gospel. This arrangement is set to continue for several months until the institution of a new Rector, so do come along and enjoy the fellowship of the congregation and the stimulating ideas that each new preacher brings.

*Edward Bean, Churchwarden*

# **Bletsoe Fete 2005**

There was no worry about the weather this year – in fact with the temperature in the high eighties sunstroke was more of a potential problem. This meant that Shirley Dawson sold out of ice cream before we were half way through the afternoon!

David Bourne opened the fete on his last Saturday as Rector of Bletsoe. We wish him, Eluned, Fiona and Hugh, well in their future life at Hailsham, East Sussex.

The fete was again sponsored by Pinewood Studios and Palmer Sports – thanks very much to them. We had a new venture with a fun dog show – thanks to Sophie and Ian Sheldon for their hard work.

Classes included: -

1. Dog with the waggiest tail
2. Best child handler
3. Best six legs
4. Best Irish brace (most unlike!)

Alison Foster took over from Chris Baldwin, raising money for advertising in the programme, and we are grateful for her getting the money in quickly.

Mike Grimes worked tirelessly getting an amazing number of old cars, which were displayed and Nick Crocker brought his bikes. The vehicle owners were offered a guided tour round the village before the fete started.

Jean Jeavons took over from Pat Baldwin organising the teas – she and





her helpers worked incredibly hard – particularly with it being so hot.

Birds of prey were exhibited once again, the Pets Corner had goats, snails, ducks and various other livestock on show and Jane Dawson provided pony rides.

Chris Grimes devised a fascinating children's craft competition and an Art Exhibition was held in the Village Hall.

The Slippery Pole and Bouncy Castle enabled the children to expend some energy, as did the Coconut Shy. Thank you to Helen Dawson.

The Ouse Valley Band helped create the traditional atmosphere. Thanks to Mike Gibbons for organising the players in their hot and thirsty work. As

usual, Mike's announcements kept everything running smoothly.

We had shirts from Raelbrook and Audrey Thompson's garden furniture.

The draw had many valuable prizes – but we didn't sell enough draw tickets so takings were down. Thank you to Jane Dawson for getting so many donations.

Thank you again to Alison Bean for organising the programme. Thank you to stall holders, advertisers and sponsors and everyone who made it a most successful day – just beating last years total with a cheque for £3,300, divided between the village Hall and the Friends of St. Mary's.

*Ann Binder, Chairman*

## **Thanks**

*We do appreciate the three years of hard work Ann Binder has put in as fete Chairman and the four that Robert Smith has put into the job of Treasurer. It is not an easy task to have to persuade and cajole us into taking part. Even the stories of rollicking committee meetings cannot have completely made up for all the hours of solid work! Considering Robert doesn't live in Bletsoe – though we count him as an honorary resident – we are particularly grateful for all his efforts.*

# Generous Villagers

Over the last year there have been a number of charity and fund raising events held by different individuals and groups, all of which have been very generously supported by members of the community. Some of these were one-offs, some annual events.

As you can see from the figures raised below, some impressive amounts of money have been raised for very good causes, please continue to support these events in the future.

## Carol singing

Just before Christmas last year a group of villagers joined together to contribute to the festivities by carol singing round the village. We were a larger band than had gathered for a number of years and we even had a rehearsal beforehand to try to get in tune.



On the night were treated to mulled wine by a couple of generous and thoughtful villagers — this helped to loosen the vocal chords. We were able to warm up and wind down after the event thanks to the generous

hospitality of Jo and Malcolm Wallis.

A total of **£185** was raised in aid of the **St John's Hospice at Moggerhanger**. Thanks to all those who donated and made it all worthwhile.

We hope to do the same again this year, so if you would like to join the happy band please call Alison Bean on 781372 to find out more.

## Tsunami appeal

On Boxing Day we all heard of the devastating tsunami that had hit South East Asia. A group of villagers, spurred on by Evelyn Baker, decided to hold a fund raising concert.

A full programme was put together by Mike Gibbons, including amazing performances from both current residents and also some of those who had grown up in Bletsoe and returned to take part. It serves to remind us how many talented people we have in such a small village. Our thanks to all those who entertained us so magnificently and also those who supported this very worthwhile cause.

A grand total of **£1400** was raised for the Tsunami appeal

## Quiz night

On 4th February the Village Hall filled with over 80 people from the village and elsewhere, each team pitting their brains against the others while acting together to raise money for Scope, the

charity supporting people with cerebral palsy, and their families.

The response was tremendous, with over **£762** being raised for **Scope**. This was the biggest contributor by far to the total of **£1500** I raised over the year as part of the White Peaks Challenge. As a newcomer to the village I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of the village in raising such a magnificent sum.

Plans are afoot to have another quiz in 2006, so watch this space ..... you will be contacted.

*Sophie Sheldon*

## **Haggis Night**

The annual Haggis Night in aid of Keech Cottage Childrens Hospice last February featured "Carlenjig" entertaining 100 people in the Village Hall with their brand of Scots folk music direct from the Scottish borders where they are regular performers at festivals and concerts.



Bletsoe's own Les Skinner took centre stage as he piped in the haggis in honour of Robbie Burns.

This year's event continued the magnificent fundraising for this important cause with a total of **£1,330** bringing the amount Bletsoe has contributed to **Keech Cottage** funds in recent years to almost **£5,000**. Thank you to everyone who came, who contributed raffle prizes and made donations - as ever, it was a splendid night and we only just managed to shoehorn every villager in by turning away some from outside Bletsoe.

The 2006 Haggis Night is already provisionally booked for 21 January in the Village Hall - date and price to be confirmed - you can reserve your tickets now by ringing Ann Gibbons (781161). Don't leave it to the last minute if you want to be sure of being there!

*Ann and Mike Gibbons*

## **Ploughman's lunch**

For the last few years, spring has been the time for an informal lunch gathering in aid of The Stroke Association. Most people know of someone who has been affected by a stroke and are only too willing to support this worthwhile cause.

The food is simple, a ploughman's lunch followed by something sweet, this year a selection of biscuits and cake, but we hope it is an opportunity to meet with friends and neighbours and enjoy a few hours together.

This year a total of **£440** was raised for **The Stroke Association**. Many thanks to all those who supported this event. Another one will be held during the early part of 2006.

*Alison Bean*



# **Notices from the Rural Community Council**

## **Carers' Rights Day**

Designed to make carers more aware of their entitlements and advice on how to access practical help.

To be held at The Goldington Centre, Barkers Lane on 3rd December.

For further details and to register your interest, call  
Freephone 0800 039 1234.

## **Volunteer Reader Required**

Could you spare 3 hours a month to help record notes?

The Community Participation Project for Improved Health and Social Care is looking for a volunteer who can help record notes onto tape. They have the equipment and can help with expenses, they just want you, your time and your enthusiasm.

For more info, call Peter Hart on 01234 838771 X109 or email [peterh@bedsrcc.org.uk](mailto:peterh@bedsrcc.org.uk)

## **Bedford Hospital—Patients Panel**

This is a group of lay people, staff and management who represent patients. They provide the patient's perspective to the trust in its drive to deliver expectations effectively and efficiently.

If you are interested, call 01234 355122 x4276 or email [patents.panel@bedhos.anglox.nhs.uk](mailto:patents.panel@bedhos.anglox.nhs.uk)

## **Safety fun day for all riders**

Saturday 12 November 11am—4pm

Shuttleworth College

Safety matters— safety information and demonstrations mixed with fun events.

For further information see poster on village notice board

## **E-rural returns**

Anyone living in rural North Bedfordshire can use the mobile IT training resource. This is a bus equipped with 5 networked computers and will come to you, just book your slot.

If you've never used a computer before, struggle with one at home or want to improve your skills, we can help.

Learn how to use the latest technology in a comfortable environment.

For more information contact Bob Hughes on 015252 878144 or email [bobh@bedsrcc.org.uk](mailto:bobh@bedsrcc.org.uk)



# **Bedfordshire County Council News**

Thank you to everyone in Bletsoe for the warm welcome I have received both before the election in May and through telephone calls and meetings since then. I am looking forward to meeting a lot more of you now that I have been elected to represent this division on the County Council. The division is a new one, created when the boundaries were changed last year, it includes along with Bletsoe, Clapham, Oakley, Milton Ernest, and Thurleigh.

I am not originally from Bedfordshire; I was born and brought up in Leicester. I moved to Bedford with my work in 1984 and I now live with my family in Oakley. I have been involved with local groups for 11 years through Oakley Parish Council and I have been a governor of Lincroft Middle School for over 4 years. I have two boys at Lincroft and a daughter at the lower school in Oakley.

I was selected in June to be the Vice-chair of the Children and Young Peoples select committee. This committee has the responsibility of overseeing all decisions made by Bedfordshire County Council on behalf of young people in education, the Youth service and social services. This has already involved me in issues such as improving the youth service where I have been trying to ensure that young people in the rural areas are considered along with those from the towns and I am also participating in the review of the education system in Bedfordshire. Currently this county

is one of only 2 or 3 who operate on a lower, middle, upper school arrangement of schooling. The review is being undertaken to confirm whether this system produces the best education for our children, or whether some other system such as primary and secondary would give better results. Although Bletsoe doesn't have a lower school, the decisions that are taken will affect local children's catchment schools. I would be very grateful to hear from anyone who has an opinion on any aspect of schooling, either our current system or any other, particularly if you have children with experience of both.

At the moment I am still finding my way around who's who in County Hall and discovering who are the right people to help us in our division. If there is anything that you think I can help you with, please contact me anytime on 07952 879587 or email; [jane@janewalker.co.uk](mailto:jane@janewalker.co.uk).

I will work hard for Bletsoe to ensure that you continue to be properly represented on Bedfordshire County Council and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the next four years.

*Jane Walker*

# Bayleaf

The autumn winds were just picking up and a howling gale was blowing through Bayleaf's hovel (now relocated to one of the few spare parts of Castle Barns that hadn't received planning permission) and through his own personal interior as well. The latter was probably the impact of Evelyn Baker's mediaeval leftovers and Neolithic gruel on his innards since she'd kindly given him several portions after some exotic feast.

Bayleaf was on his way to the annual meeting of Bletsoe Parish Council. The council had decided that they didn't want a Chairman so they'd all share it. "Very democratic or totally bonkers", thought Bayleaf, "it'll just mean that they'll all think they are in charge when, in reality, they know it's either Peter Hetherington or the Clerk who make all the decisions". (Later in the year, the Parish Council was going to become the first virtual council in the country by not holding any meetings at all except round Edna's kitchen table when the Clerk would read the minutes to her during the ceremonial scraping of the carrot).

As Bayleaf struggled his way down The Avenue he was reminded of Bletsoe's ever-present interest in preserving the ways of Olde England. This was particularly true as he fought off the mastodon which appeared out of the undergrowth whilst struggling through Audrey's Footpath Forest.

This was reinforced by the sight of Bishop Bean sitting on his step, stalk of corn in his mouth, trying to repair another of the collection of 47 pre-war bakelite (non-working) radios he was currently collecting to the despair of the Bishop's wife who had long ago given up any pretence of tidiness in his office (or her kitchen but we won't go there). Bayleaf had heard that the Bishop's wife used custard powder to stiffen things up a bit - Bayleaf wondered if she could be of help to him too.

Both the fat churchwarden (who was getting thinner) and the thinner churchwarden (who was getting fatter) had become grandfathers to lovely little baby girls, which brought a little tear to Bayleaf's rheumy old eye (he'd left the other one at home). "It must be something to do with cleaning the church gutters", he ruminated, if only he could be heard above the cooing in both households.

It was the afternoon meeting of Bletsoe WI, otherwise known as Auntie Button's At Home. Everyone had come for a cup of tea and to exchange some produce. Auntie B, overcome with her new role as Village Hall Barman, was serving Earl Grey in optics. Bayleaf clambered round the Bring & Buy Jumble Sale where Betty Gibbons was buying another jar of WI jam to put in her cupboard (in addition to the 18 that are already there!) Yvonne Martin, meanwhile, was looking enviously at a mobile phone cover to protect one of her handsets. She had two mobiles so that she could leave one under the Deas' bed (and no, no-one knows why she did that either or how it got there)!

A howling sound filled The Avenue air only just drowning out the clatter of horses' hooves as a posse of middle-aged men on motorbikes pottered down the village. The creak of leather-clad thighs on saddles reminded Bayleaf that he also possessed a wide range of leather nether garments. Maybe he'd found a soulmate?

"If you live in Memorial Lane or Bennett's Close, the men need a motorbike or a scooter", mused Bayleaf. "everything from Peter's OAP Vespa to the Harleys (or similar) though Top Row Paul appeared to have traded in his motorbike for domestic bliss, a guitar and marathon-running (though he kept the last bit quiet as he didn't want anyone in the village to know).

He passed Bletsoe Cottage where, for much of the year there had been a fleet of Mercedes parked on the grass in the garden. Presumably the potholes in the drive were only passable if you had the 4x4 or maybe they are building a motel on the corner so Lynne can become the new Amy Turtle?

AGM season was definitely here. The Chairman of the Friends of St Mary's had thanked everyone on the committee profusely for all their help. Except her husband. That went down well.

Bayleaf hoped this one was better. The Parish Council Annual Parish Meeting started with Frank Pickle reading the minutes of a year ago. Not a lot had happened. Then the councillors talked about mowing though the audience were, for some reason, more interested in talking amongst themselves about a chiropodist that was visiting the village the next week.

"Sometimes", thought Bayleaf, "it feels like part of Bletsoe is still in the 1950's and another part is in a parallel universe but maybe that's why we all like living here"?



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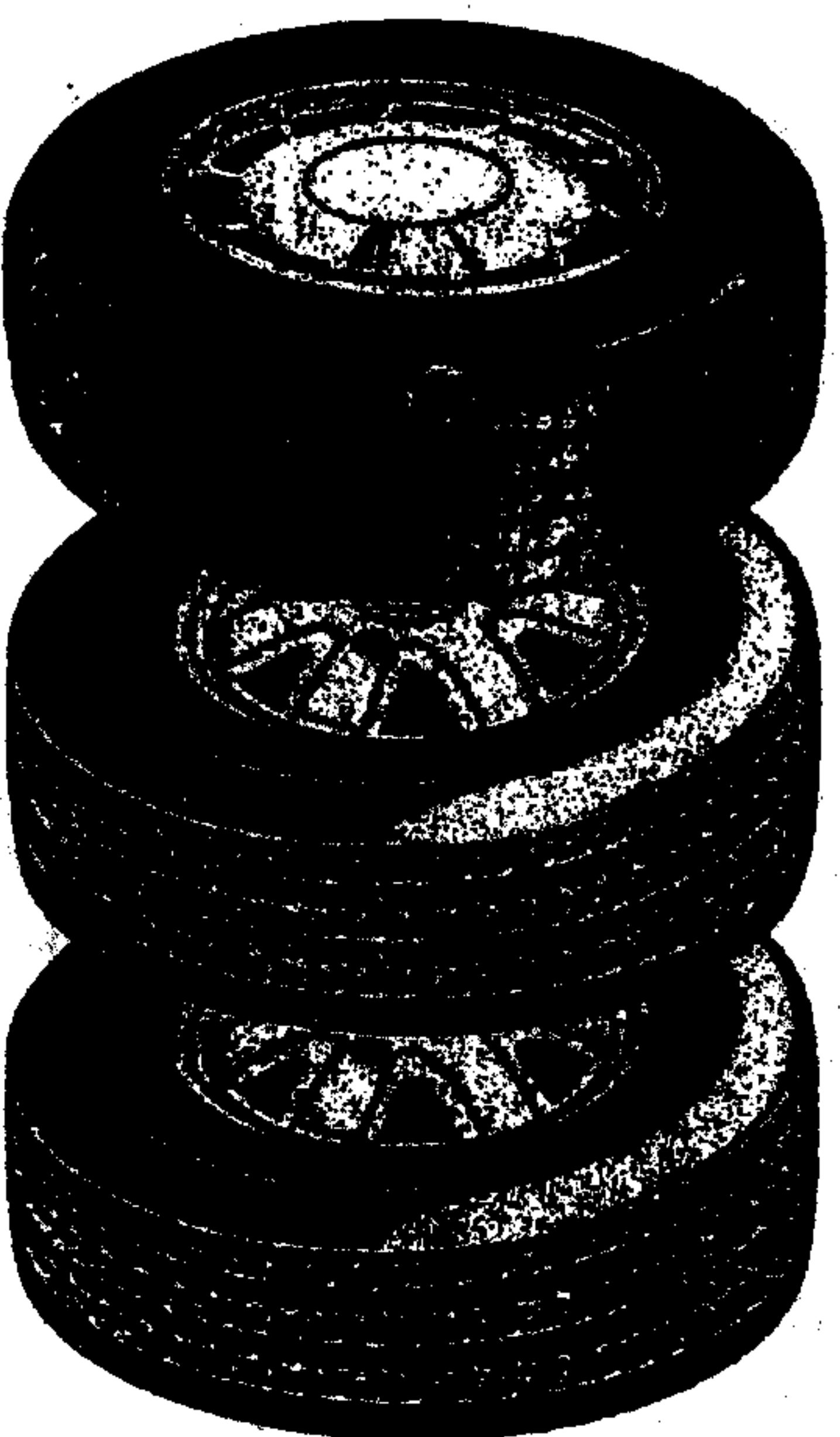
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