

## **“A Recording of Prominent Residents in 1976”**

led by Bob Farren in May 2009

This members-only evening introduced us to:

- Tom Mills, Church Warden
- Robert Farren, as Chairman of the Parish Council
- Raymond Coquerelle, Belgian printer based at the Monastery
- John Fowler of Fowler Brothers, builders, and
- Gerald Walker, farmer and proprietor of a caravan holiday company residing in Maplehurst.

Tom Mills was born in Cowfold when transport was horse and cart and there were few cars on the road. There were two general stores that supplied everything from groceries to clothing, boots and shoes and furniture. There were two schools, two bakers, two butchers, two sweet shops, a haberdasher and a saddler. The shops kept open longer and the grocers closed at 10 pm on Saturdays.

He reported that the Reverend Basil Brenton was the Vicar in 1976 and that Church records go back to 1232.

The village school opened in 1875 and the eight council houses in Station Road were built post WW1. Station Road was so named as at that time West Grinstead Station, two miles away, was the nearest station. Buildings did not change much until after WW2 with five new estates built since then.

In 1976, they were discussing issues that still concern us today - traffic on the A272 at peak times and congestion caused by the South of England Show and the Hickstead Show! Bob referred to a meeting where WSCC Highways, a police traffic officer and our County Councillor met with the Parish Council to discuss the traffic problems. The question of the 1964 By-Pass Plan was raised and we were told that there was no possibility of that being built in the foreseeable future; in fact, the suggestion was made that it would probably be cheaper to move the Village. There were subsequent meetings, which resulted in the mini roundabouts that we have now.

Bob recalled how at the age of 10 or 11 everyone walked everywhere. He also recalled a Sunday walk to West Grinstead Station and back with his mother and grandmother when, on rare occasions, his mother would say: “Stop, I think I can hear a car coming”.

Back in 1976, St Peter’s Restaurant was in Les Routiers guide book, the Sweet Shop next door had a notice “Duck or Grouse” over the door as you entered and you could buy Sussex Butter Drops.

A Parish Potpourri was performed in the Village Hall.

The village shop was owned and run by Mrs Bacon.

The WI (one of the first formed in England) had 42 members and 34 regularly attended the meetings, mostly about crafts and cooking. Mrs Usher was President.

The first sports pavilion was a WW1 recycled army hut rescued from behind Alfreys in Bolney Road and re-erected where the present scout hut is situated. The present pavilion was also based on a recycled wooden building; Angus Fraser was the architect in charge. Now, of course, there is fundraising for a new pavilion.

The land that adjoined the pharmacy (now the Post Office), called The Red Lion Field, was sold to WSCC for road improvements. Some time before the pharmacy was built, there was a plan to build shops and flats there but it was tied in with a projected widening of Station Road and this not go ahead because of financial restraints at the time.

After the pharmacy was built, Horsham District Council put forward a plan to build 16 flats on the site but local people wanted it kept as a green and an unloading facility for the Village Hall. At an Annual Parish Meeting this was discussed and residents were so appalled at such a large development, it was turned down with a 94 to 1 vote against. At a subsequent public meeting the vote changed to 49 in favour and 29 against. However, the Parish Council continued to object and eventually the number of flats was reduced to 10 and named Fairfield Court.

The population in 1976 was 1,300.

John Fowler described how the business of Fowler Brothers started in 1853 as a wheelwright in what is now Station Road; then the business grew and spread to other sites. They started building swimming pools in 1957 and, in 1976, employed about 80 men.

Raymond Coquerelle said that, 62 years before, he came to stay at the Monastery for just two months. He gave the background to how the land was acquired and many details covered in Michael Gething's article. In 1976, there were about 25 monks.