

Bluntisham Village Magazine 2008

HISTORIC CHANGE AT THE VILLAGE SHOP



OPEN ALL HOURS – FOR 52 YEARS



Ever wondered what it is that makes us who we are as a nation? It's a fascinating subject, which has long vexed politicians, poets and playwrights. Perhaps John Major's vision of warm beer and old ladies on bicycles, or Gordon Brown's focus on local heroes hits the spot for you? Or perhaps the combination of William Blake's evocative words and Elgar's stirring tones which together make 'Jerusalem' so powerful is the winner? Maybe you prefer the words of the Bard when he talks of 'this precious stone set in the silver sea'?

For me though all these miss the one of the enduring ways we define ourselves. It took a Frenchman – Napoleon himself – to hit the nail on the head when he said we were a 'nation of shop keepers'. How many times have we arranged to meet someone 'outside the shop', popped in for milk or for a gossip, or discovered in the nick of time that you can still buy locally the evaporated cream, shoe polish and newspaper that you forgot at the supermarket? Where would we be without the local shop? From the 'Kabin' corner shop in Coronation Street to 'Rowell's' in our village, much of our lives seem to revolve around the corner shop.

Rowell's has a long history too. Tony Rowell took over the shop on 5th September 1956. His aunt originally owned the shop, and he bought it from her two daughters. He and his wife Gill passed the reins over to Andrew and Barbara in 2005, and then eventually retired on the sale of the shop on 4th September 2007.

Anyone who knows Tony will appreciate that he has a lifetime of special memories, but one in particular illustrates how important something as simple as a local shop can be beyond a place to buy bread or a paper.

"Gypsies" as they were known then visited the village every year, and were regular customers at Tony and Gill's shop. Gill's father and brothers were horse dealers

at the time and had regular contact with Gypsies visiting the area and Gill can still speak some Romany to this day.

One particular group – the Price family - came every year in their 'vardo's' (the old fashioned 'round' Gypsy caravans). They camped in the orchard opposite what was Bluntisham railway station. Coming from near Birmingham, they would work in the spring sowing, and then come to Bluntisham for plum pulling and after that off into Cambridgeshire for potato picking. The women used to sell lace and ribbons, but that was mostly out in the Cambridgeshire countryside. Their vardo's eventually gave way to lorries and caravans, and they stopped coming when the fruit trade largely ended about 20 years ago.

Tony's story goes that they always shopped with him, buying four loaves of bread, 2lb of cheese and a hock of cheap bacon daily, but on Saturdays they always went to St. Ives. One Friday night, Mr Price, who'd been working for a Mr Fear, came to the shop and asked Tony for a favour. Mr Fear hadn't paid them, and he asked if Tony could lend him £100, promising to pay it back straightaway. Well, Tony lent him the money, and on the Sunday, Mr Price appeared and gave Tony his money back plus £20 for making the loan.

When it came to Tony's retirement there was a collection, and Gill and Tony chose to have a painting done with the money. The artist was Susan Eddy, and in the end there was enough for two paintings, so Tony chose a painting of Ramsey Abbey where he went to school, and Gill had one done of the 'Backs' at Kings College. She went to the High School for Girls in Cambridge.

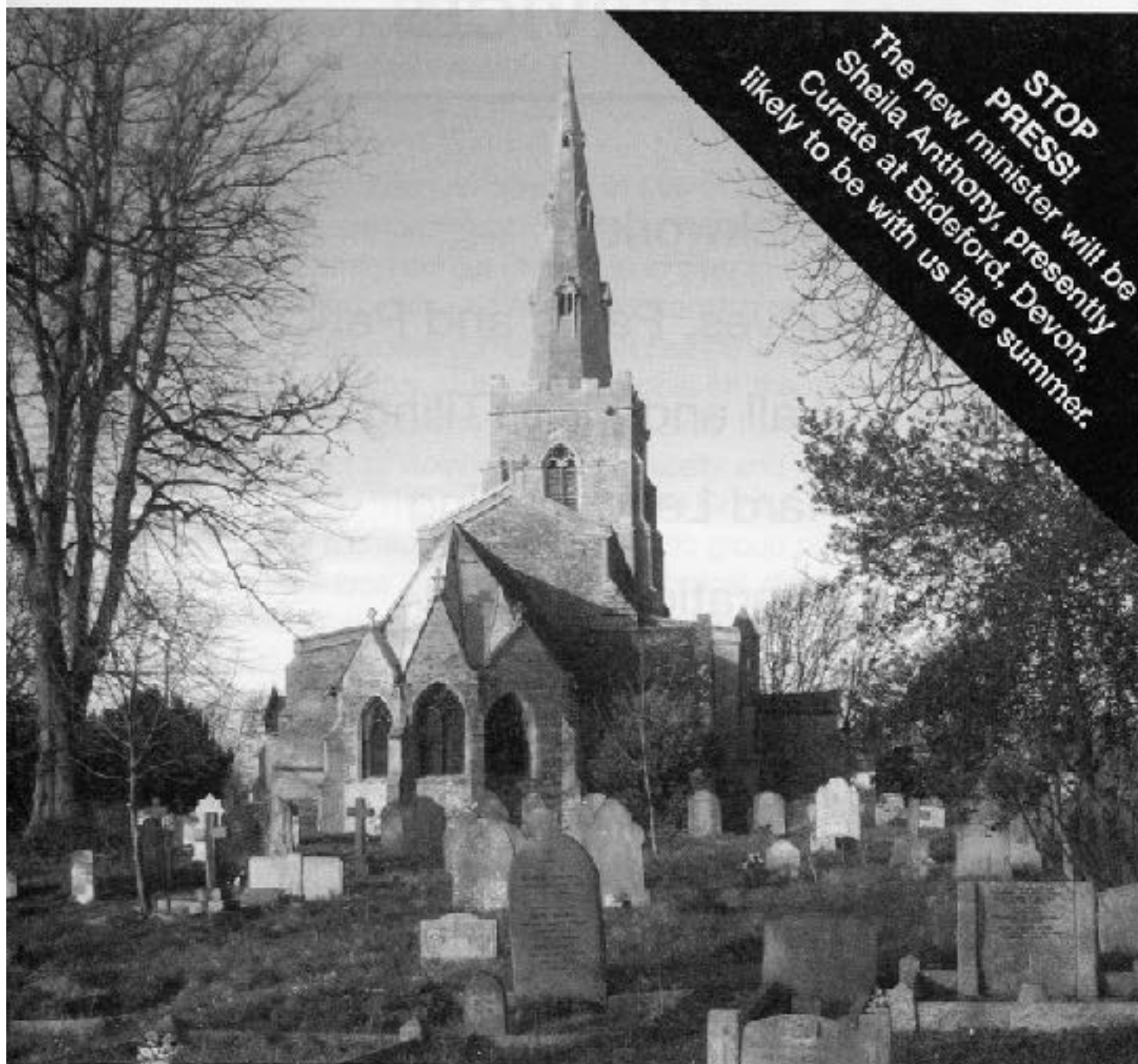
Tony and Gill are both enjoying retirement, and Tony continues to serve on the parish council.

Although we may be saying goodbye to the Rowell era at the village shop, it continues under new management. Nationally, supermarkets may grow inexorably, but the local shop will exist for a long time yet as part of what makes us who we are. In my book, the local shop is right up there alongside the pub, Her Majesty and the flag. And I reckon for 52 years 'Rowell's' was amongst the best of the bunch.



NEW ERA FOR ST. MARY'S CHURCH, BLUNTISHAM

We've been without a minister now since October 2007. We have not just been keeping things going but have endeavoured to consistently provide a variety of styles from the ing at heart to the more traditional services. You would be very welcome to join us.



**STOP
PRESS!**
The new minister will be
Sheila Anthony, presently
Curate at Bideford, Devon.
likely to be with us late summer.

In January 2008 we advertised for a new minister and interviews were held on 7th March. At the time of writing we are expecting two applicants. If there is a successful appointment the position could be filled in the next few months.

Please check out our notice board or Newsletter for service details or contact
Peter Reason on 01487 842611.

Also our Church Room is available for hire, please contact
Debbie Rudwick on 01487 841004.

Or do you fancy taking up bell ringing? Please contact
Mike Bateman on 01487 843534.

OFFICIAL OPENING OF BLUNTY PROJECT YOUTH CLUB

As a young person who joined the youth club renovation project in October I was really pleased with how the official opening day went.

We all met early on the opening day and set to work quickly as we had so much to do. The morning flew by and up to about ten minutes before the first guests started to arrive we were all busy and getting more stressed by the minute, we were having problems getting the ribbon across the door tied and everyone was still arguing about who should do the speech before its cutting!

At 2pm the guests were assembling outside the hall and we were all so relieved and pleased to see how many people were arriving. Once the building had been officially opened we all went inside so that everyone could see the results of our hard work.

The youth club has proved to be really popular since it's opening with an average of 25 young people attending each week. Ideally we would like to open an extra evening a week but currently we do not have enough youth workers or volunteers to achieve this.

Chris Nash

If you interested in joining **Blunty Factor Youth Club** and are aged between 11 and 17 then please feel free to come along on a Thursday evening from 6.30pm to 8.30pm.

If you would like to volunteer to oversee the sessions with a trained youth worker then please ring either:

Alice on 07527 093864 or Teresa on 01487 840864



From left to right: Lewis, Chris, Becky, Kelly, Daisy, Alex, Alice and Emily, who are all committee members along with Teresa Whiteman and Katie Low of Young Lives.

A WALK AROUND BLUNTISHAM IN THE 1930s

Tony Rowell

In June 2002 Tony Rowell walked around Bluntisham, starting at the crossroads on the Heath, recording how the village looked in the 1930s, pointing out where various people lived and recalling anecdotes as he went.]

Starting at the Woodhurst crossroads, the house on the corner which was once a public house and a resting place for horses and carriages (although before I can remember) now belongs to a Mr Tunnicliffe who is a poultry farmer. The poultry he keeps in moveable 'arks' on the fields surrounding the house.

Continuing along Heath Road, towards the village, we come to Mr Pingree's house, which is next to the Cambridge to March Railway. I can smell the smoke now as we watched the trains go under the bridge; it was also said the doorknob on Mr Pingree's front door was level with the top of the spire of Bluntisham Church.

About a further half-mile towards the village brings us to Mr Godfrey's 'High Wood' farm – a mixed farm that grows both corn and fruit and raises bullocks. Yet another half-mile or so is Mr Bluff's 'Barnfield' farm of mixed arable, fruit and livestock. All the land so far, on the left-hand side, down to the Manor, is in ten-acre strips and is farmed by Messrs J Abbot, Wallis, J Searle and S Abbott. The next three, ten-acre strips are farmed by Mr J Abbott (my grandfather).

[In 1937-38 my grandfather sold the corner of the grass field to the Cambridge Water Company to build the water tower, which serves a big area as far as Warboys and Ramsey. When the tower was being built main pipes were laid from wells at Barith across the fields to the tower, and also the pipes delivering water to the houses in the local villages. A firm called Shanks from Hunstanton built the tower and laid the big supply mains and another company laid the smaller mains through the village and into the houses.]

Now we come to the beginning of the village proper with the first house on the left being The Manor owned by a Mr Godfrey who keeps a flock of poultry in the meadows behind the house.

Nearly opposite the Water Tower is a farm belonging to Mr B Chapman and, in the corner of his farmland, is about an acre of land planted with fruit trees, which has been the site on which one of the Bluntisham mills had stood. This particular mill had been called the Town Mill.

Opposite The Manor is a guesthouse with a millstone doorstep, owned by a Mr Ashton (known by his nickname of 'Tripey' Ashton, possibly because he prepares tripe). The house is surrounded by about six acres of grassland, part of Wood Farm, which was at one time common land, unfenced, and the site of the Bluntisham Feast held annually during Feast Week of 21st September. On the left-hand side again is Mr Fred Searle's farm with two thatched cottages with big, round brick chimneys; some of the oldest in Bluntisham.

Continuing down Wood End, there is a lane on the right, called Fanny Kempler's Lane because Fanny lives in a house at the end. (This is now Nobles Lane.) Opposite the lane is a little house, which ends onto the road. Another lady lives here by the name of Ashton who befriends Dr Barnados Boys. At the back of this cottage is an old Chapel.

Next to this property is a large farmyard and building where a Mr Humphries lives. He is a carver and carpenter and made and carved the present pulpit in the Baptist Chapel. He also sings tenor in the chapel choir.

On the left, at the end of his house and yard, is where Mr Pratt lives and, at the back, is a bakehouse he, at one time, being a baker. His daughter lives with him, a Miss Ethel Pratt, and she is a dearly lady who teaches the Primary Class of the village school as well as the piano (including me and a cousin who went on to play the Baptist Chapel organ).

Mr Cecil Tebbutt lives in the big house opposite which, at one time, was another public house; the cellars still being there. Cecil is a wonderful sportsman, playing cricket as a googly bowler. He is a first-class fielder and batsman who, many times, by his efforts wins matches for Bluntisham. He is also a very good shot, billiards, darts and tennis player.

The next property in Wood End belongs to a Mr Sid Hand who is a blacksmith and has another shop along Colne Road, one at Earith and one at Needingworth, employing five men. He also makes farm implements for use at harvesting. This property adjoined Mr Hodges' yard who has steam engines and threshing machines. Opposite is the 'Engine and Tender' Public House with deal tables, sparsely furnished with deal forms.



Do you recognise where these pictures were taken?

Next are four thatched cottages, inhabited by my great-aunt, Mr and Mrs Johnson and a family whose son Frank died aged 100 years in 2002; D'Diddy Hudson and his wife and Mr and Mrs Edwards. On the left-hand corner are two more thatched cottages. Mr Ward lives in one and in the other keeps bicycles, which he rents out a 3/6d per week.

Next Mr and Mrs Topper, who have a horse and cart and collect fruit in season, which they take from the farm to Bluntisham Station, being the agents for J. J. Ramsbottom of Southport. The fruits they transport start with gooseberries, raspberries and strawberry followed by plums and apples which they collect and take to the station where they leave by train at 4 o'clock every day, arrive in Southport next morning for the market at between 5 and 6 o'clock.

Adjoining a long whitewashed house is the 'Saracen's Arms' another old public house which is occupied by Mr and Mrs James who is a builder and he also organises the Bluntisham Second XI cricket team with all the local lads and is extremely successful in the Turner League. [One man who played in the team was the late Sam Fox who was, up until 1922, the only man to make 100 runs on the Bluntisham ground. Sam lived with his aunt at the 'Engine and Tender'.] The next house is called 'Hope Cottage' and Mr and Mrs Allgood live there. He is a jolly man who grows onions and 'Epicure' potatoes.

Mr Sid Ward's property is next and opposite (are) four cottages which belong to a Mr David Godfrey of Swaffham Prior who also owns another 12 houses in the village. He is the biggest landlord at this time and charges 5s per week.



Photographs reproduced with thanks to Tony and Gill Rowell, and Colin and Sally Whitaker.

Next to Mr Ward is a yard full of buildings, a house which ends on to the road, and a petrol pump which belongs to Mr Frank Mehew and all the sheds are full of bike parts and old bikes. A boy's paradise! He loves to talk to us lads. One shed is his office and next is his workshop, then a large shed where he has a large battery charger and always 50 or more accumulators where people exchange them as they run out of juice. In the next shed stands an old Overtime tractor used with a saw bench to cut wood. He also owns another Overtime tractor which is housed in the Old Water Engine house and where he is in charge to pump the water from the dykes in Bluntisham Fen to the River Ouse.

Opposite is a wooden-clad bungalow owned by Mr & Mrs Bert Mehew who run a carrier's cart. They sell compressed wood fruit baskets and Bert is the agent for a chemical company in Evesham to sell fruit spraying materials.

Next to Mr Mehew comes Bunyan Lodge and on the corner Miss Croft, who is Primary School teacher at Colne School. Mr & Mrs Tom Chapin live in the bungalow on the corner and the house, again, ending on to the road next is the Ex-Servicemen's Club. Here is played billiards (snooker later on) – two full sized tables, darts, cards and dominoes (are) also played.

Down to the corner of the High Street – on the right hand side Mr & Mrs John Abbott live in a house on the left.

Continue the 1930s walk with Tony Rowell in the 2009 magazine.

This article first appeared in 'Keeping Time by the Crows', Fenland Oral History Project, University of Cambridge, Institute of Continuing Education 2002. © Tony Rowell.

THANK YOU!

Without our advertisers, many of whom live in
Bluntisham, our village magazine
wouldn't appear.

So we'd like to take this opportunity
to say a very big "thank you"
to everyone who took out an ad
in this year's magazine
and we hope you'll all be back
next year too.

Peter David Lumb 1st February 1937 - 15th April 2007

David was born in Rochdale and was sent to Giggleswick School. While in hospital recovering from an appendix operation when he was seven, he decided he wanted to go to sea. He chose the Merchant Navy as he didn't like the idea of all the discipline in the Royal Navy. He went to Warsash Sea School before joining P&O. His first trip to sea was on a sailing ship. He joined cargo ships and travelled all over the world and became proficient at cargo stowage. This proved useful for packing suitcases and cupboards later on!!

He settled near Bournemouth after his first marriage and had two sons. P&O bought Princess Cruises in the 70s and he was appointed Chief Officer on

"Sun Princess". His favourite cruising area was Alaska and he sailed on 70 cruises there.

He settled in Bluntisham in 1976 when he married for the second time and had a son and daughter. After a few years he moved within the village to a larger house to accommodate his model railway, his main hobby.

He was appointed Captain and his last command was his favourite, the "Canberra". He retired in 1997 and quickly involved himself in village life. He took over the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and helped to set up an area panel in St. Ives. He was Chairman of the local branch of the Royal British Legion for three years. He was co-opted onto the Parish Council and then became editor of the annual Parish magazine. He was very involved in the Village Hall Project and very happy when it finally came into being.

Ill health forced him to curtail some of his parish work when he was no longer very mobile but still liked to go out each day, if he could, on his scooter around the village. He liked to meet people and chat. He could no longer access his railway in the loft so bought a computer game to design layouts that way.

David lost his battle with cancer last year after celebrating his birthday with a party in the Village Hall and completing the Parish magazine. His ashes were taken to Alaska and scattered on the water by a pilot station, so that he is forever in a place he loved so much. The family bought a bench for the village so that friends can remember him and the family hope that it will be well used.

