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WATTON AT STONE PARISH COUNCIL CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS
26TH NOVEMBER – 4TH DECEMBER 1994





WATTON-AT-STONE PARISH COUNCIL CENTENARY YEAR

This booklet has been produced to celebrate the centenary of the Parish Council and to give readers a brief outline of the village life and times over the past hundred years or so.

The history of how the rich landowners came to the area, where they lived and how many of them came to be here are well documented elsewhere in the Village Guide. As a person coming into the village some forty years ago, I can only give an account of what changes I have seen taking place.

Now, with the help of many of the old residents of the village and the records that have been stored away for many years, this booklet and the special events being held to mark the 100 years of Watton-at-Stone Parish Council can now give you some idea of what the village was like in the past.

The programme of events for this centenary year is given in this booklet. Please come along and support the events, as much work has gone into them.

At this stage I would like to thank all the people who have given their time to making this centenary celebration a success.

Bob Ansell
Chairman
Watton-at-Stone Parish Council
November 1994

CENTENARY WEEK PROGRAMME

Saturday 26th November 1994

A grand dance will be held in the Memorial Hall from 8.00 pm until midnight.

The dance will be in period costume of the past 100 years. Music will be for all tastes and types of dances up to the present day.

Tickets will cost £7.50 and will be available to all persons over the age of 18 years. A Fish/Chicken and Chip supper is included in the price, and a licensed bar will be available.

Tickets will be available from Parish Councillors and committee members, or contact the Clerk of the Council on 830330. Please book your tickets early to avoid disappointment.

Sunday 27th November 1994

An afternoon church Service will be held in the Parish Church. This will be a combined service with the Methodist Church. The service will be between 3.00 and 4.00 pm. Everyone is welcome.

In the morning, it is hoped that the Church Tower will be open to visitors who wish to climb the steps and view the village.

Monday 28th November 1994

A display of photographs taken during the Jubilee celebrations will be on display in the Memorial Hall. Also on show will be a video made from films taken on that occasion and during the mill fire in 1967 and the floods of 1968.

The Hall will be open from 3.00 pm until 9.00 pm and the video will be shown at regular intervals during that period. Refreshments will be on sale between the above hours.

Entry to this event is free, but children must be accompanied by an adult.

Tuesday 29th November 1994

The bowls club meet on this evening in the Memorial Hall. They have invited interested members of the public to watch the games and perhaps try their hand – tuition will be given! Entry is free.

The craft club will be holding their November meeting in the Hall at the rear of the Methodist Church. Cake icing is being demonstrated and

Watton-at-Stone Parish Council, in conjunction with other village organisations, will present to the village a week of entertainment to celebrate a hundred years of Parish Councils in Watton-at-Stone.

everyone is welcome to attend.

Wednesday 30th November 1994

An evening of talks on local history and archaeology will be held in the Memorial Hall, commencing at 8.00 pm.

The speakers will be Mr Tony Rook, 8.00–8.45 pm and Miss D Abel Smith, 9.15–10.00 pm. Refreshments will be available. Do come along and support this most interesting event, entry is free.

Thursday 1st December 1994

The Parish Council will perform a meeting of the Council taken from the Council Minutes of one hundred years ago. This will be in costume of that period.

Entry to the meeting is by invitation only and guests will include past Council members and Clerks. Other interested persons should contact the Clerk to the Council. During the light refreshments, there will be a display of old council records, etc.

Friday 2nd December 1994

Watton School will be performing a special centenary event by the older children illustrating schooling through this period. This will start at 7.30 pm and run for approx 45 minutes. Refreshments will be available, followed by traditional music hall songs at the piano. In addition, an exhibition will be held of material from the school archives.

Saturday 3rd December 1994

The Centenary Exhibition will be open in the Memorial Hall from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm. The entry is free, but children must be accompanied by an adult. Refreshments will be available at a small charge.

Many village organisations are participating, as are the Police, Hertfordshire Countryside, Hertfordshire Mercury and many others. Exhibits will consist of photographs, documents, costumes, old hand tools, artwork, etc.

Sunday 4th December 1994

Second day of Centenary Exhibition, open from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm.

Please come and support all the events. Thank you.



THE PARISH COUNCIL OF WATTON-AT-STONE THE HISTORY

In the year 1894, the Local Government Act was passed by Parliament after more than a year of debates and amendments.

Under the Act, Parish Councils could be elected in villages with a population of over 300 inhabitants. In all, some 6880 Parish Councils were set up.

The spending of a Parish Council was limited to the equivalent of a 3d rate. In fact, most Councils found they had the power to do certain things, but had not got the money to carry them out.

One advantage of the act was that it gave the right to married women both to vote and to be elected to the Councils.

The first meeting of the Parish Council in Watton-at-Stone was held on Friday 4th January 1895 at 7 o'clock in the evening, in the Parish Room, now recently restored as cottages, alongside the present sports field.

It was agreed at that meeting that the ancient name of Watton-at-Stone should be officially applied to the Parish Council, and this was confirmed by Parliament under 'The Parish of Watton-at-Stone (Naming) Order, 1895'.

The first chairman of the council to be elected was Mr Abel Henry Smith. The first clerk to the council was Mr Silcock.

Meetings of the council were held on a regular basis, with Minute and Account books being kept. The Minute Book of the Parish Council will be on display at the exhibition in the Memorial Hall.



THE VILLAGE AND ITS VILLAGERS

Bob Ansell

Watton-at-Stone has, in recent years, been extended out of all recognition. With another 70 more units being built in the near future at the old station yard and oil depot, entry to the village from Datchworth will take on a new look.

How do we see the village of today? Perhaps we should take our minds back and find out a little bit more about Watton some fifty to sixty years ago.

First the housing areas of the village. In those days, most of the houses were along the High Street and many had been built in the 16th century, although many are not here today. The major housing developments took place within the past fifty years, those being: Beane Road (1946), Glebe Close (1948), Rectory Lane (1948), Hockerill (1956), Great Innings (1964/1977), Lammas Road (1960), Hazeldell (1970) and then the small infilling. Not forgetting Rivershill (1967), site of the dreaded flood of 1968.

The villagers of sixty years ago are names that we know of today, many being related. Perhaps we should start with the Register of Electors for 1934 and select a few names that come to notice.

ADAMS, William Henry, with his wife Elizabeth, kept the Waggon and Horses public house at the end of the village. At that time, it was also a farm with pigs and cows.

Another great old family name was **ALDRIDGE**. At the time of the 1934 register of electors, this family showed 10 persons entitled to vote.

The **AYLOTT** family is best remembered for their connection with Woodhall Estate as estate workers. The name has been given to the small development off the High Street – Aylotts Court.

BEADLE is a name that has been in the village for many years. Today many of them are not directly related, but it is a family name that has had many sporting connections in the past, and still has today.

BONNETT, perhaps the name that



Ed Aldridge receiving the cup from his wife at the flower show, watched by Don Stewart

“There were fields where Hazeldell now is...and the old school used to have a bell on top”



gave bread to the village. The lane opposite the telephone box in the High Street is where the old Bake House stands. This is still referred to as Bonnetts Ally by the old folk in the village.

The name **BUNYAN** must foremost be remembered for Herbert (Bert) (above) who lives in Rectory Lane. A man of many talents in both sport and building. Bert was a past chairman of the Parish Council. It was Bert who supervised and built the present Pavilion in the sports field. Not many people know that, and it was voluntary. No I haven't forgotten you, Peter, or your sons, another sporting family of Bunyans.

CARTER, Alfred, who lived at Whempstead for many years and later at Glebe Court, worked on the farm and did much for his fellow workers, as a trades union man. His son lives in Hockerill, and is one of the old cricket players.

CROUCH, Charles George with his wife Lily kept the George and Dragon public house.

DULEY, Thomas Alfred with his wife Grace kept the off-licence opposite the pump in the High Street.

MONK, This name is listed as having 20 registered electors, not all related I feel. Perhaps the branch of the family who were most involved in the village were those who ran the transport business and farm, now the site of Newmans Court.

MOTT, George and Bert, both builders in the village for many years. A tribute to them is the small estate named Motts Close.

NATTRASS, Arthur and his wife Ada lived at the house in the High Street known as the Firs. This house was once used as a café and tea rooms, but not by Arthur, he ran the local newspaper round, also a wet fish business.

Right:
Repairs to the Pump roof,
with Duley's Off-Licence
in the background



Below:
High Street looking north
towards Watton Place



NEWMAN, Hugh with his wife Maude owned Watton Place Farm. The house is now the Doctors' Clinic and the large barn that has been converted into housing was then known as Newman's Barn, thus the name of the development being Newmans Court.

PARKER, this name was strong in the village sixty years ago. The two sisters living in the bungalow at Hockerill are from that family. One of them, now Mrs Griggs, is 91 and her sister is 90.

SHIPPIN, another old family name. The two sons Bill and Ted both played cricket and football for Watton. Ted still sings in the church choir and rings the bells. Their mother made my wedding cake some 41 years



ago. Another name that may be remembered by some of the village is Miss Shippin, the school teacher who lived in school cottage.

STRANG, David from Watkins Hall Farm and his son Chris. David was a Parish Councillor and played many roles in the village.

Where does one stop when writing about villages and the people who live in them? If you or your family have been missed out of this short history of the village, don't despair, there will be others.



Above:
Allison's Saddlery, now occupied by Sandy's

Left:
The old Tea Rooms in the
High Street.
As well as being a café
and newsagents, dancing
classes were held here
every Tuesday!





WATTON-AT-STONE VILLAGE LIFE

Bob Ansell

Going back over the past 100 years, village life has changed in many ways. Perhaps we should look back to the turn of the century and recollect the people, the housing and the work that they were involved in.

THE PEOPLE

As was the same in most villages in the country, the inhabitants were made up from families that had lived there for generations: people that had come there to work, or to run a business or who just wanted a home in the country. Not a great change from today you may say. Most marriages came about between domestic workers introduced into the large houses in the village and farm workers and other



place, as their relations could be standing near by!

THE HOUSING

Watton was made up of estate workers' cottages, farm workers' cottages and trades people's housing. Many of the cottages had earth floors with dry bricks that had to be scrubbed and kept even. Drinking water was collected from local wells. Pumps were outside most cottages. Rain water was collected from the roofs in large water butts, and was mainly used for the washing of clothes. Sanitation was very bad in the village, with most cottages having earth toilets and no bathrooms.

WORKERS IN WATTON

Many people were employed on local farms and estates. Some cycled to Hertford and some were employed by the County Council to maintain the roads and verges. During the building of Welwyn Garden City, some of the old trades people would walk there and back. In later years, a bus service ran to Hertford, taking many of the local people to work in the factories there.

Many men were employed at the local transport yard of Monk and Hawkins, also a small engineering company, called Watton Engineering, was housed in what is now the Butcher's and Hairdresser's.

A chicken factory was started at the old mill, in Mill Lane, some years before it was burnt down in 1967. The oil companies had a storage depot in the old station yard until 1993. A fish curing factory was situated on what is now the site of Newmans Court.



Estate workers cottages, above, and the ploughing matches which took place annually, right

tradesmen. Many of the old family names remain of today but, alas, some have gone for ever. It was the custom in those days for people to have nicknames. It was some years after coming to the village that I really got to know what the real names of some of them were. Take the Aldridge family for example. On the male side, there was Edward George (Boots), Reginald (Stockings), Arthur (Tiggy), Harold (Brusher) and George (Nibbs). Many of the older people of today still refer to the nicknames. A person coming to live in the village through marriage or work was classed as an outsider, it sometimes taking many years for them to be accepted. It was very unwise to mention some person in a public

“My father was a shepherd, then a cowman... he used to bring our milk home on the front of his bike in a can... it tasted different to bottled milk”

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WAR & PEACE



“I remember seeing soldiers in the hall... and tanks in the High Street”



“We had a parade through the village... the rain didn't seem to spoil things too much”



“The waiting rooms on the station looked like doll's houses”



“We had two playgrounds and a vegetable patch... the headmaster was very strict”





PEEPS INTO THE PAST 100 YEARS

Bob Ansell

Gales swept through Watton in the winter of 1923-24 causing untold damage. Prior to the gales, large elm trees lined both side of the Church Walk. These were blown down across the pathway. One tree demolished the small bier house just inside the church gates. This was rebuilt by voluntary labour in the summer of 1924, and is recorded on a brass plate on the door of the building.



The buildings known as the Old Work House Yard were destroyed during the last war by a bomb. Harry Parker and his wife were killed as a result of this action. These buildings were on the right hand side of Mill Lane, just beyond the mill (left). The mill itself was destroyed by fire in 1967.

The north, or top end of the village, had many buildings, one of these being the Wheelwright and Undertakers. This was run by a Mr Hamer. The only thatched cottages in the village were at this end of the High Street. These were destroyed by fire in the early part of the century.

The main building of what is now the BP Garage has had quite a number of uses. It started off as a Maltings, prior to the war. During the war it was used for making ammunition boxes. After that Bert Spicer and his partner started up a garage there. In those days the building came out to the road, with a petrol pump in the front of it.



The changing face of Watton Service Station – in Bert Spicer’s day, (left), and as we know it today, (below)



The Wheelwright and Undertaker’s

If we turn to the south of the High Street, we find Watton Cottage (below), a house known to most of the older people in the village as the Doctor’s House. One



of the Doctors was Eric Hodges (right), who spent many years in the village. His family donated two seats in his memory, one at the end of Church Walk and one on the Hockerill estate. Other doctors who followed him in the house over the past 60 years were Dr. Wigfield, Dr. Murry Ainsley and Dr. Forbes.



The Pump before the Station Road junction was moved to the north side



“We used to meet at the mill in the evening and play knock-down-ginger, especially on dark evenings, until the local policeman caught us”



McMullen’s Off-Licence, High Street north

“They had a money gadget which ran across the shop from the counter and then came back with your change”



We now move up to the centre of the village and take-stock of what was there and what remains today.

The Village Hall, now known as the Memorial Hall, was built in 1914 by the Abel Smith family of Woodhall Estate. At the end of the 1939-1945 war it was handed over to trustees in the village to act as a memorial to those who served during the war and to those who gave up their lives in that war. It was renamed The War Memorial Hall, and all funds that had been collected during that period for a war memorial were handed over to the trustees to help maintain the hall.

“We fetched water from the pump across the road ...we had to get a lot to have a bath...”



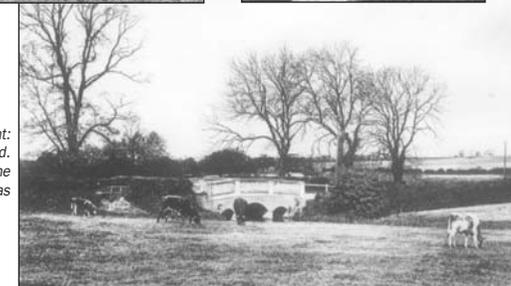
Right: Walkern Rd. from the Lammas

Next to the Hall was the Blacksmiths shop and meadow. This was run by a man called Smith, who lived in the cottage next to the Forge. The last blacksmith in the village, in the 1950s, was Bill Stubbington.

Next to the shop now known as Summans was a small Baker’s shop called Barrons the Bakers. In later years this was turned into a Post Office by a man called Roger Prince, now it has reverted back to a private house.



Above: Martha Schulze with Bill Stubbington in the background, c.1953





VILLAGE SPORT

Cled Fursland

Over the past 100 years and before, there are records of sport being played in Watton. Perhaps we should start with the main sports and take a look into these records.

CRICKET

One of the first matches recorded in the local press was in the year 1839. On the 24th of August, Watton played Buntingford and beat them by one run.

Other games that were played at Watton were recorded with many of the old names being mentioned, names such as H. Bonnett, L. Bonnett and F. Coggin.

It is thought that matches were played at Woodhall Park from about 1886 up to 1910. This was when the present cricket table was layed by staff from Woodhall.



The score book of the old Watton and Benington Cricket Club

“We played hockey and football against other schools on the meadow”



Left: Watton Cricket Team 1912

Below : Watton Cricket Team 1977. A few recognisable, if somewhat younger, faces here!

Bottom: Another fine innings for our team



FOOTBALL

Records of football being played in Watton date back to 1906. A photograph dated 1906 of Harry Monk dressed up in his football gear is about the only evidence of the game being played then. A later photograph of the team in 1913 has been lent to us by Mrs Monk of Station Road (right).

The football pitch in the early days was at the sheep walks, an area of ground at the rear of Watton Green. It then moved to the old rifle range, this is the meadow on the right of Mill Lane. It moved to its present spot in 1957/58.

Some of the old players are still in the village today and many of their kin play today. Names like Aldridge, Spinks, Bunyan, Coggin, Austin, Milton, Monk, Parker and many more.



NETBALL

This was played by the local school girls as far back as 1928-29. The club has recently been re-formed.



TENNIS

This is not a game that has many old records in the village, but we do know that it was played on the grass courts that backed on to the houses numbered 141 to 145 in the High Street, and now part of Rivershill.

In the mid 1970s and early 1980s, a strong club was formed in the village. Games were played at the private courts of Crowbury and Heathmount School. At present the club play on the multi-purpose play area at the sports field.



RIFLE CLUB

Watton had a rifle club way back in the early-1900s. There is an unconfirmed story that states it was disbanded after the accidental shooting of a farmer's cow !

If after reading this short report of sport in Watton, you have any photographs or memorabilia that relates to sport in the village, would you please contact Cled Fursland at 40 High Street, Watton-at-Stone. Thank you.